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The
RAINFORD
SERIES.

WILL ROOD'S FRIENDSHIP.

BY

GLANCE GAYLORD,

AUTHOR OF

"GILBERT STARR," "GILBERT'S LAST SUMMER AT RAINFORD," "BOYS AT DR. MURRAY'S," ETC.

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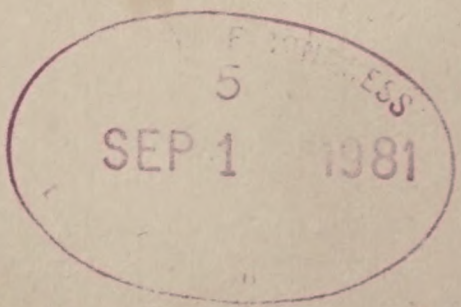


TO MY FRIENDS,

G. W. B. and C. W. C.,

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH MANY

PLEASANT REMEMBRANCES.

Contents.

CHAPTER I.

On the Bars, - - - - - - - - - 9

CHAPTER II.

Journeying, - - - - - - - - - - 25

CHAPTER III.

Friends Indeed, - - - - - - - - 37

CHAPTER IV.

The New Life, - - - - - - - - - 54

CHAPTER V.

The Shadow does not Lessen, - - - 70

CHAPTER VI.

From Trouble to Trouble, - - - - - 85

CHAPTER VII.

Will Rood's Forgery, - - - - - - 102

CHAPTER VIII.

A Thunderbolt from Clear Sky, - - - 118

CHAPTER IX.

HOME, - - - - - - - - - - - 133

CHAPTER X.

TELLING HIS STORY, - - - - - - - 148

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE RICH MAN'S HOUSE, - - - - - - 162

CHAPTER XII.

THOUGHTS IN THE NIGHT-TIME, - - - - - 177

CHAPTER XIII.

LOOKING FOR A LETTER, - - - - - 191

CHAPTER XIV.

WAYNE'S CONFESSION, - - - - - - - 207

CHAPTER XV.

THANKSGIVING, - - - - - - - - 223

CHAPTER XVI.

TAKING HOPE, - - - - - - - - 239

WILL ROOD'S FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BARS.

BROTHER JONATHAN (they called him Johnny for short, but if he is to have his name in print it must be written out in full) seemed to have caught the gloom which had settled upon his master's household. He lay upon the doorstep in the Spring sunshine, looking very dejected. Though his master's son, Will Rood, was coming up the meadow-lot that sloped southward from the low old farm-house, whistling as merrily as possible, Brother

Jonathan did not wag his tail once, but looked at the boyish figure from out his brown eyes, and behaved as a dog should that knows his master's first-born is about to leave the home-nest for — nobody knew how long.

The whistler, as he came to the bar-way on the opposite side of the road from where Brother Jonathan was keeping staid watch of things in general, paused on the top bar to look around him for the last time for many months to come. The old farm-lands lay very bright and pleasant under the sun. The trees were just tinging themselves with green, and down in the orchard apple-trees the blue birds and robins were piping gleefully. In the far distance Farmer Rood was plowing his corn-land, and in the morning silence his voice floated dimly over to Will, as he gave commands to his oxen. Will had just come

from there after a last good-by. He looked back now, remembering what a kind, fond father he had — proud enough of him too, it was evident — and feeling his heart full of those high resolves that come to boys at times, and which came to Will very often, because he could not forget how this farmer-father of his had toiled late and early to keep him at the great boarding-school, down at Newland, those four long years.

It had cost a great deal of money — this long stay at school — and it was what no other farmer in Burlingwood had done for his boys. This was why Farmer Rood's bank account was not so prosperous as his brother farmers', and why he had to toil early and late, though his hair was getting gray.

Deacon Wilcox and old Uncle Frisbie had actually felt it their duty to remon-

strate about this "eddicatin' Will so much above the rest o' our boys," and advised brother Rood to keep his boy on the farm where he couldn't run into evil and learn the ways of the wicked city. But Farmer Rood had answered — leaning on his hoe-handle and wiping the sweat off his brow,

"Will don't take to farmin' and don't like nothin' but book-larnin', and book-larnin' he shall have if it's to be got out o' this farm." And "book-larnin'" Will had had just as long as he would suffer his father to pay those great bills which came up every quarter from the boarding-school at Newland. But now it was over, and the burden was off the old farmer's shoulders.

All these things were in Will's heart, as he sat on the top bar looking across the meadows to where the brown furrows were being turned up to the sun, and besides the remembrance of all this toil on his

parents' part, there were plenty of resolutions there to do them honor where he was going, and to pay back as much as possible of this great debt in gratefulness of well-doing. He was going to take care of himself, now. This was an unspeakable delight and pleasure! He was going where he had, at least, one very kind friend and an opening to future success, and perhaps wealth,— something unusual for one so young; and sitting there in the sunlight, of course he built very splendid air-castles, just as all boys will and must because they can't help it, and of course he saw the happy time ahead, when father and mother were to be kept in comfort by his earnings, and wee sister Mabel sent to school. Now you must know how Will Rood came to have this opening before him.

About the middle of those four long school years, during one summer term, Will

saved a life. They — all the boys of the great school — were bathing in the river off one side of the town. It was a warm, sleepy August noon, the river still and smooth as glass, locusts whirring in the great trees over the bank, and the boys making a great din and plashing in the shadowed water under. Suddenly somebody cried, "Help! help!" and another voice shouted, "It's Shirwyn, and he's got the cramp! Quick! quick!"

Will, who was well out from shore, looked over his shoulder and saw Shirwyn struggling near him. With the quick consciousness that comes with peril nigh, he saw that of all his comrades he was nearest, and that if Shirwyn was saved it was he who had got to do it. So, without any wavering, he struck out for his unfortunate comrade and was beside him in a twinkling.

Wayne Shirwyn, full of the terror of

death, had not sufficient coolness nor forethought to remember what he would have remembered at any other time, and so clasped his rescuer about, clinging as only the drowning can cling — thus drawing Will into the same danger with himself. But Will, with a stout heart, battled death for them both, and though nearly strangled, succeeded in keeping up till there was plenty of aid from the others. Now the two had never been friends — not because of any enmity, but for the reason that Wayne was a rich man's son and had other associates, and Will belonged to another class, and knew little of the comrade he had rescued.

But now this was all changed. Wayne Shirwyn was sensible enough to remember that wealth did not rank him one whit higher than his rescuer, and that he owed a debt of gratitude which all the money

in the world could not pay. When it comes to the matter of drowning, gold loses its shine and beauty; and Wayne's ducking put some very sensible and manly ideas in his head that were never there before. He was grateful—he *felt* it—and tried to tell half of it to Will. Will was cool, and told his rich friend that he should have done the same, just as soon, for the red-headed butcher's boy—the pest of the whole school. For which Wayne liked his rescuer all the better, and did his best to make a friend of him, and though Will was shy and distant for a long time, perseverance at last won the battle, and Will's prejudice against rich men's sons vanished, and they were excellent friends.

The Shirwyns showed their gratitude in every letter that Wayne received from home. Wayne went up to Burlingwood, and spent a long Summer vacation, and got himself

as brown and burnt as Deacon Wilcox's Zebulon, or Uncle Frisbie's Samuel. They all liked him, from the prim deacon down to the roughest farm-boy in the village, and in some way or another he got himself acquainted with nearly everybody in the town, and the old aunties and uncles and the farm-boys and farm-girls lost half their prejudice toward city-bred people — which is saying a good deal for Burlingwood folk. And when it came time for the two boys to return to books again, Wayne announced his intention of spending the next Summer's vacation in the same manner, declaring it was the happiest six weeks of his life; but before the winter was half gone, Wayne was called home from school to be placed under a private instructor in his own city, and so the two had to separate.

This, however, did not end the friend-

ship, and seemed only to strengthen it. Letters went between the boarding-school and city, and Will had a standing invitation to visit his friend, and his friend's parents, but never quite made up his mind to do so — thinking all the time of his father at work on the stony old farm, and of mother scrimping and saving — and kept at his books, bound to do as much in his four years as the rest of his comrades had marked out for five. And he did it. Then he went home from the head of his class with plenty of praises, looked upon as one who was to make his mark in the world. (Which is pretty much the way all boys are looked upon sometime in the course of their boyhood.)

Now, hardly had he got back to the familiar sights and sounds of the sleepy old farming town, when there came a letter from Wayne Shirwyn, enclosing one from his

father, in which that grateful gentleman offered Will a situation in his office which, if it pleased him, would open the way to future advancement. The work was to be mostly writing and Will, if he chose, would be welcomed into their family as one of them. Wayne's letter begged that, "if you haven't got some profession picked out which you are going to strive for (and I don't believe you have, for you've never hinted such a thing to me) *do* accept father's offer. He'll do splendidly by you, for I know just how he feels. He knows that but for you he wouldn't now have *me*. We shall be rejoiced to see you — father, mother, Nina, Mother Bunch and all. And then we'll have delightful times! You won't go to being a farmer after all that double work of yours? *Do* accept," ect., ect.

The Roods could hardly believe their eyes. Their Will to have such a chance

as this, and because of a little act done more than two years ago and which had nearly faded from their memories!

"He deserves it!" said the farmer, with honest pride; "it isn't every day they can get such a boy as our Will, for all they may have their pick. I've heern say the city got its best life out o' the country; the country givin' to the city all the time to make its strong men and its workers, and when they get Will —" Here Will himself entered and this self-gratulating little speech was never finished. But, as boys run, I suspect they had some reason to be proud of him.

In some way or another the news got out, and Deacon Wilcox came over post haste to know if it was really true that "your son, brother Rood, is agoin' into an office down to York, just as ef he'd had a masterin' sight o' experience?"

Brother Rood, with a little thrill of pride, replied as quietly as he might, that he "did believe there was some prospect on't."

"Really," said the deacon, "your boy is mightily favored in worldly prospects. See to't he don't get into the wiles o' Satan, brother Rood. Snares are thicker'n stone-heaps on your hill lot — spread out to catch the feet o' our thoughtless youth. I feel as ef you was runnin' a fearful resk, sister Rood — a dreadful resk."

"Will's always had his mother's prayers — and his father's too, as for that matter —" said placid mother Rood, "and he's been a good boy. I'll say that for him. Husband nor I never had to take a hard word from him — never! — and he's worked hard at his books down there at school, — twice as hard as the rest, the principal told us, and —"

"Wall, wall," said the deacon, who could by no means say this of his Zebulon, "I've

nothin' agin Will. He's a likely boy, an' I hope he'll do credit to his bringin' up an' old Burlingwood. You may tell him that from me if you like, sister Rood. By the by, when does he leave town?"

"To-morrow morning, if all's fair," said the farmer; "they're in a hurry for him down there, I believe." There was no time for the deacon to listen further or say more, for here Zebulon came along with the ox-team.

Now you have the whole story, and know why Will is going to the city, and what has called him; and now, as he looks back over the meadows and orchard to the old man toiling in the corn-lot, do you wonder that his heart is full to overflowing of the truest and bravest resolves that ever enter into a generous, manly boy's heart? And do you wonder that these resolutions brightened into the fairest of air-castles, wherein father

and patient mother, and sister Mab were to dwell in happy comfort? But the air-castles suddenly came down with a crash that took Will quite off the top of the bars. The cause of this sudden downfall was Mr. Thaddeus Upson's stage-horn, and the sight of the big overgrown stage lumbering over the curve of the hill. Will ran in, and Mr. Thaddeus, having been previously notified, drew up before the gate where the trunk was standing.

CHAPTER II.

JOURNEYING.

MR. THADDEUS UPSON had driven stage over this hilly, up-and-down road since he was a red-faced, shambling youth of twenty. Having now become a great burly man with whiskers inclined to grayness, he was of course familiar with everything and everybody along his route, and had grown, along with his years, to take an interest in the dwellers in the low-eaved farm-houses. In a certain sense they were like his own kin. He knew whose boys had turned out well and whose ill, back for the last twenty-five years. He could tell when widow Brown's son broke his

neck by falling backward off a load of hay, and when the meeting-house was struck by lightning, and when the great wind came that ravaged the orchards and spoiled the whole apple crop; and as for minor events there was no limit to the quantity which Mr. Thaddeus had stored in his head. He knew too, by some method of divination known only to himself, that the passenger whose trunk he had just secured was going to enter upon a new life in the far-away city, and when Will came out with mother's and Mabel's kisses warm upon his cheek, and a suspicion of moisture in his eyes, Mr. Thaddeus silently thrust down one great red hand to assist his passenger up beside himself, and considerately forbore to speak. Then, with his usual "All right!" and a great crack of the whip, Mr. Thaddeus started on.

Fair, sloping farm-lands, fresh brown fur-

rows, orchards and robins, the toiler and his oxen, the old red house with Brother Jonathan standing forlornly at the gate, slipped slowly into dim distance, and when they were all shrouded in the blue Spring haze, Will turned his face forward to the journey and the new life before him. Then it was that Mr. Thaddeus lost his silence, and presently became so voluble that his passenger had enough to do to keep pace with his grave remarks and queries.

At Sandplain, the railway station nearest Burlingwood, Will left his high perch, glad to change positions after his two hours' ride, and not very sorry to be rid of his companion. Mr. Thaddeus, after bringing down the trunk, extended his hand, said, "S'posed like enough he was shakin' hands with a future governor or big railroad man or sumthin'," and went on his way.

Sandplain was intersected by railways, and though only a village there was always a good deal of stir and bustle at its drab-colored station-house, which made the hour of waiting rather more endurable for Will. The waiting-room where he sat was almost empty, the gentlemen seeming to prefer the platform outside, so that his only companions for the time were three or four red-visaged men who sat around the fireless stove, talking politics and laughing very loud.

But Will was entirely unmindful of their conversation, his thoughts having all gone on before to the great city, Wayne, the new friends he was to find, and the new life he was to enter upon. By and by he became conscious of a slow tap, tap, tap upon the platform without, the sound drawing nearer till it paused at the door, was still till the door opened, and then there

entered—such a fragment of a man! Will gave an involuntary start at the sight of him. He could not have been over three feet high—Will doubted if he was that—and had crutches to aid him. A well-grown dog would have run over him. And such a face!—dried, wrinkled, yellow and sickly-looking. A rim of coarse sandy whiskers framed it in. On his head was a little old cap which was altogether the largest part of him.

Will looked on with mingled pity for this poor atom of humanity, and sudden joy in his own healthy, perfect body. It had never occurred to him before that by any possibility his strong, active limbs *might* have been dwarfed and shriveled like this creature's. A sudden gratefulness kept him motionless, his eyes following the elfish figure as it went tapping over the floor to the opposite side of the room. Presently

this pigmy went under a table which stood in the corner, lifted the lid of a great box which was there, and much to Will's astonishment, proceeded to take out peanuts, oranges, maple-sugar and many kinds of confectionery which he arranged on the wooden settee beside him. Then, after considerable exertion, he succeeded in climbing up beside them and there he sat — like some tiny, ill-visaged elf — waiting for customers.

So this morsel of man earned a livelihood! Will looked down at his own hands, and with the warm color brightening his cheeks felt almost ashamed, somehow, that they had never earned a penny. If this dwarfed, crippled mite of man could earn his daily bread and fight his way in the rough, overbearing, careless world, it should go hard but his own perfect hands should earn enough for father and mother and Mab,

Will thought. That was one consolation he got in looking at the cripple. Then he walked across the room and became the dwarf's first customer by emptying his pocket-book of its pennies and postage stamps. Then he discovered that deafness was also added to the list of this man's afflictions.

But few customers appeared, till the train from Collinsville came down, and then the waiting-room was filled to overflowing. There were all kinds of faces,— faces that were merry and faces that were sorrowful; aged faces contrasted with youthful ones; faces that reflected pure hearts and faces grown hard and cunning from long association with evil. Red faces beamed comfortably on sickly ones, and mild, kindly faces shone beside others that were almost disgusting. This crowd made a great buzz of talk. As it slowly surged about the room —

now backward, now forward — those on the outer edge would come in contact with this elfish dwarf. The first glance would hardly notice him, then would come a startled second look, and then they would eye him askance, saying to themselves, it was plain, "What manner of man is this?" A red-whiskered, rough-looking fellow was his first customer, patronizing him out of pity, Will was sure, as he was plainly not a man with money to spare. A white-cravated clergyman was the next purchaser, and then the sales began to be rapid. Every one — smart, rough, pure, evil and all — bought lozenges, nuts or maple-sugar, giving this wee particle of their brother man a half-curious, half-pitying look as they made change.

Will had greater faith in men after that, discovering that there was more pity and kindliness in men's hearts than he had

dreamed of. Many a time after that his heart beat warmer and more hopefully, thinking of the dwarf and his motley crowd of friends.

At this juncture Will's train came in, and he was soon speeding toward the great city. Familiar old Newland was soon reached, and here he caught a glimpse of friends' faces, had a delightful five minutes' talk with schoolmates, and went on his way with their good wishes and blessings making his heart very warm and glad.

And when he was well settled for the long afternoon ride, thoughts which had been waiting all day for a leisure moment crowded fast upon him. Would Wayne be much changed? Could a year have made him much taller, and would a year be time enough in which to change from a happy, generous-hearted fellow into — But pshaw! Wayne could not change! What a foolish

thought. Very likely it was he himself who had changed, if change there had been on either side. Would Wayne be glad to see him? Of course. Would the Shirwyns *really* welcome him as their letters said? He was not so sure of this, — feeling somewhat in awe of the stately gentleman who called to see Wayne at school one day.

The Shirwyns were rich, and what the Burlingwood people called "aristocrats;" Will was only — a poor man's son. He felt it a little, just now — wishing that he could go to the Shirwyns as their equal in every respect; wishing that he had not been so eager to accept their offer, which might have been made more from a sense of obligation than gratefulness, and almost regretting that there was now no opportunity to reconsider his decision.

These groundless fears, for utterly groundless they were, oppressed him somewhat

all the long afternoon, and when the day, fading into an amber twilight, brought them into the outskirts of the city, it was with a kind of dumb longing for home, warm joy at the thought of meeting Wayne, and dread at meeting the others, that he picked up his book, Harper's Weekly, and overcoat, and waited for the rumbling train to come to a standstill.

The lamps twinkled out, the roar and din of a great city depot burst upon them, and Will hurried into the crowd, where he had not been three minutes before some one seized him by the shoulder, whirled him half-around, crying out, "Will Rood, you blessed fellow, don't you know me? Where's your hand? Isn't this jolly!"

If Will was not well shaken up it was no fault of Wayne Shirwyn. When it seemed to him as if there had been enough of hand-shaking to answer all purposes, Will ventured to remonstrate.

"Well, I'll hold up till we get home," said Wayne, busy with taking Will's packages. "You're all right, I know by your looks, — so am I, — and we won't stop to bother about the questions just now. Come on, Will, the carriage is waiting. We'll get home just in time for tea. O jolly! ain't I glad to see you! Baggage? We'll let the baggage go till morning. Come on — this way!"

Again Will was seized upon, hurried through the crowd to the street without, a coachman shut them into the carriage, and in a twinkling they were rolling up the street — Wayne bending his head close to Will's, and keeping up a steady chatter above the rattle and rumble. Wayne had changed, outwardly. A year had added a good deal to his height, so that he was now taller than Will, who was a little the elder. He had one of those high, proud faces

which one may often see among delicately-reared sons of rich men, and as he sat among the velvet cushions, gracefully bending to catch every word his friend uttered, generous-hearted Will thought him the perfection of everything noble, handsome and manly, and was confident that, even if Wayne had grown a bit proud-looking, none of this pride had crept into his heart.

The wheels grazed the curb-stone, Wayne sprang out, pulling Will after him, and without any pause took him at once up to his own room.

CHAPTER III.

FRIENDS INDEED.

"THERE!" said Wayne, in a pleased tone, as he closed the door, "here you are. Now you're just in time to get washed, combed, and ready for tea. Father 'll be home in fifteen minutes. Let me wield the brush. Sit down here, old fellow." Will sat down on the end of a lounge by a pale-glowing grate of coal which the chilliness of the Spring evenings made most acceptable. His eyes took slowly in all the brightness and the elegance of this room of his friend's, between their ceaseless flow of queries and answers. The warm-colored evening sky beamed in at the windows,

making everything rich and soft-hued. A little marble head looked down over its shoulders from the bracketed mantel, over which hung a painting like a tiny window looking upon a pale, emerald-tinted sea where evening shadows gathered. The luxury of everything exceeded all Will's imaginings. Mechanically his thoughts went back to his own bare, dimunitive room under the rafters at home, and from thence he found his way down into the little kitchen where, at this moment, he knew that father and mother and Mab were gathered. "Hallo!" said Wayne, giving him a little punch with the brush handle, "have you gone back to Burlingwood already?"

"No,— well I forgot where I was, for a second," Will admitted; "what a pleasant room you've got! How did you ever exchange it for our little closets at boarding-school?"

"O, bother!" said Wayne, suddenly, "it was easy enough. I almost wish I was back at Newland, sometimes,— don't you? Now your head will do — and here's the bowl and soap and— Jolly! you ain't a bit taller that when I saw you last, do you know it? You make me feel gigantic. There are towels when you're ready for them." Will plunged his hands into the marble bowl. "Ah," said Wayne, dropping down upon the sofa and looking at his friend admiringly, "how fresh you are! I really believe that farm is a blessing for you, after all. Glad to see you? I guess I am! I told mother a week ago to-day, that I'd give all my next month's spending-money if I could buy off the long week, and get you here with us at once. I don't know how I've spent it! — I only know I'm wonderfully glad it's gone, and you're here to stay with us — nobody knows how long."

"That is, if I suit, you know," said Will, with his face in the towel.

"Suit! — oh, pshaw!" said Wayne, impatiently; "you're one of the kind not apt to suit, aren't you? I know just how it will be. Father will take to you as if you were his own son. You are to be one of us — that has been decided, and I shall be thankful if you don't run me out the family affections entirely. But don't you trouble," said he, coming to where Will stood, and affectionately putting an arm over his shoulder, "I shall not be jealous in the least. I want to share home and their love and everything with you."

Will was silent, for the simple reason that he felt such generosity was beyond thanks. When he spoke, he said, "You're the same old Wayne — just the same."

"Am I? Do you think so?" said Wayne, eagerly. Then his face crimsoned and he

turned suddenly away, saying sadly, "No, no! — you don't know — you can't see. O, Will! if I had only stayed at Newland with you, and — and — "

"Well," said Will, after a wondering pause, "how would it have been different with you?"

Here, to the evident relief of Wayne, there came a clumsy rap at the door. Wayne answered it. "Ah," said he, pulling in a little girl of four or five, "let me introduce you to the Family Affliction, Will. She was christened Mary or Maria, or some other heathen name, but the classic cognomen of Mother Bunch has grown to her, and Mother Bunch she is."

Mother Bunch put up her bit of a mouth invitingly, and Will kissed her heartily, thinking of Mabel.

"So you're Will?" said she, standing on one foot to look at him.

"Yes, he's Will," said Wayne; "the Will who pulled your good-for-nothing brother out of the river, and came near losing his own life."

"I like him," said Mother Bunch, looking critically at the new-comer from head to foot. Wayne laughed a little, tumbled his sister's curls and told her to run away; and close upon the lingering echo of Mother Bunch's feet, came the silvery tinkle of a bell. "Tea, at last," said Wayne, turning on the gas, and scanning Will closely, with an eager desire to have him look his best and brightest; "you're ready? Then come."

Of course Will's heart beat fast as they descended the broad stairway, and thought of what he had got to undergo as soon as he passed within the half-opened door below, where the light streamed out so brightly; but if he had any doubts of the Shirwyns' sincerity in their offer, they all vanished at the first words that were spoken.

The family were all there, and as the door opened, the stately gentleman of Will's remembrance came forward, and at Wayne's, "This is Will, father," shook the stranger's hands warmly, and said, "You are very welcome, my boy. We are not strangers in the least, for we have all known you two years already. My dear," turning to the tall, stately lady at his elbow, "this is Will Rood. Not quite so tall as our Wayne, but a trifle stouter,— and Nina, this is your brother's friend."

Nina Shirwyn, a girl of fifteen, came forward and put her hand in Will's, looking half-shyly at him and saying cordially, "We have all been waiting patiently to see you,— except Wayne. He has been almost wild for a week."

"There, Nina," said Wayne, "don't tell of me too much, because I may retaliate, and tell Will how a certain young lady —

Here Nina seized upon Mother Bunch, saying, "Here is some one who has not been introduced."

"Ah," said Wayne, "you're mistaken, for Mother Bunch got the first introduction, as usual. And Will — this is all of us." Then they sat down to tea.

A boy among strangers — strangers moving in a higher circle than he has been accustomed to — and with just a little home-sickness in his heart, can only know the gratefulness which filled Will Rood as he sat down among his new friends — for friends he felt they were. Their cordiality and delicacy touched him. His heart warmed toward the stately man who endeavored, by all the acts familiar to kindly hearts, to put his guest at ease and make him feel that he was a part of them.

If this was what the Burlingwood people called aristocracy, Will wished it might be

imported by some of the country folk who looked upon city-breeding with disdain. Mrs. Shirwyn, presiding over her cups of fragrant tea, Mr. Shirwyn at his end of the table, Nina, radiant and smiling, Wayne delighted and brotherly, and Mother Bunch sober and regardful, all seemed to take him in at once as part of themselves, much as if he was a long-absent son and brother, whose return made them all brighter and happier. And Will, recognizing this, was glad and happy.

Of the evening which followed, Will had but confused memories — everything was so new and strange to him. He was conscious of wandering among the bookcases in the library with Wayne, of wondering whether one poor head could ever hold a tithe of the knowledge which such a hoard of books was supposed to contain, and of noticing Mr. Shirwyn at his writing-table at a far end, busy over letters and papers.

From thence they passed into a balmy-breathed, dimly-lighted conservatory, where the vines drooped and brushed against them, where lilies looked up white and pure, and the heavy sweetness of tropical bloom made the air almost oppressive. Then suddenly they stepped out of the fragrant dusk into the brilliant parlor where the rest of the family were sitting, and Mother Bunch, about to depart for the nursery, came up to kiss him good-night as Mabel had always done. So, with his head and heart full of fragmentary, glowing pictures of this new life upon which he had entered, Will bade them an early good-night and followed Wayne.

"Now where am I to go?" said Will, as they paused a moment in the hall for Wayne to ring for some water.

"Go? Why, to bed, of course," said Wayne, looking at him with some surprise. "Where else would you go?"

"Nowhere. I only meant where am I to lay my head?"

"Oh — I'll show you, presently. Thank you, Blecker," to the servant, as he took his goblet of ice-water. "Now, come on, Will."

They went up the stairs that gave no echo to their footsteps, along the wide corridor, and entered Wayne's room. The fire had died down to a bed of flameless coals that flushed the room all warm and rosy. Will looked in, thinking that in the whole world there could not be a room more lovely or desirable, and that it was no wonder that Wayne had grown so handsome and noble-hearted living among such beautiful things.

"Well," said Will, a little admiringly, "this is your charming room —"

"And yours," interrupted Wayne.

"Mine?"

"Pshaw! don't make me out of patience with you the first night. I told you you

shared everything with me — *everything*! This room is ours — yours and mine. Please walk in and take possession," said Wayne, throwing himself down upon the sofa and regarding his friend with mingled delight and amusement.

Whatever anticipations his reception had given him, Will had not looked for this. "Wayne, he stammered, "really, you hadn't ought to do so much. I don't expect it,— some other room, not so nice, would be better, and it's too bad to disturb you."

Wayne laughed. "Poor fellow!" said he, commiseratingly, "it is too bad. But the trouble is not without remedy. There's the back attic where the old furniture is stowed, and it's got a bare floor, and likely some cobwebs, and an occasional rat. It's nice and chilly, too. Shall I show you up?" Will was at a loss for an answer. Wayne got up, took him by the arm and pulled him

down by himself on the sofa. "There, you foolish fellow," said he, "you make me so much trouble, that first I know you'll break me of laziness. Don't disturb me again for anything. This room and all that's in it is yours just as much as mine. If you ever mention the subject again, I'll never forgive you for it. If you're tired — and I know you are — you can go to bed. I like to lie here and look in the fire." Will was tired, and began to make preparations for going to bed. Wayne regarded him with dreamy, pleasureful eyes, saying, after a long silence, "You don't know the good it does me to look at you,— just to *look* at you. Will," abruptly, "you were always stronger than I."

"At ball, yes; but not at wrestling," said Will, at work over an obstinate shoe-string.

"Pshaw!" in a vexed tone; then more softly, "I didn't mean that, Will,— not strength of body, but of other things."

"O-h-h." Will drew a long breath and took a side look at Wayne. "You look comfortable and happy," he said, smiling.

"I know,— that's all you or anybody see, just the outside. Oh, I think, sometimes, that I *won't* bear! — that I *won't* bear it!"

Will looked up, bewildered. "Why — why, I don't understand," he said; "what are you talking about?"

Wayne hid his face in the pillows and clutched them desperately. When he looked up it was white enough, and Wayne was trying to smile. "I think, sometimes, that I'm a fool!" he said, vehemently. "Here I'm talking like this to you the first night. I'm afraid I shall make you bother enough before you've been here long. I ought to have told you not to come, but I was selfish — selfish. I'm afraid for you! O, Will!"

Will's bewilderment only increased. He looked at his friend with a troubled face,

and eyes that begged an explanation, and was silent. Wayne jumped up.

"Oh, dear, I'm only making matters worse!" he exclaimed. "Don't look at me like that, you dear old fellow. We're all glad you've come — we're all rejoiced — it's the very best thing in the world for you. It's only me that's wrong, vile, wicked — whatever you call it. I'll tell you all about it in a few days, Will — if I can get the courage. I'm in trouble — and it worries me; but I know you'll help me out for you are stronger than I. Now don't let's think of it again," he added, with an attempt at his old cheerfulness. "We'll both go to bed, for it's time."

He threw down the folds of the dainty bed as he spoke, whirled his velvet slippers into a corner, and bustled around the room, using every means in his power to distract Will's thoughts from what had just passed.

In a measure he was successful. Will's face lost its troubled look. Wayne turned off the gas, save the single jet at the bed's head, and settled himself down comfortably among the sheets. Then came a little awkward pause — only for a second or two. Wayne looked up, on the point of saying, "Where've you gone to, Will?" But his face softened in a moment, and when, after some minutes of silence that seemed very long, Will rose up from where he had knelt, Wayne looked at him wistfully and in silence.

At last he said, "Now, I *know* you are the same Will Rood as ever. You do just as you did at school — when there were only two or three in the whole room that did as you did. O Will!"

"And you?"

Wayne gave his friend a sudden, impetuous hug. "You're stronger than I! — I'm

ashamed beside you. O, my dear Will, if you knew how I want to lean upon you — But pshaw! I'm getting on the same old subject. You're tired and sleepy. Happy dreams for you, and good-night, old fellow."

"Good-night, Wayne."

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW LIFE.

THE Shirwyns' hospitality did not grow cold after their first welcome of the new-comer. Nothing was said about going to work, and Will found himself with nothing to do but enjoy the endless trips and excursions to places of interest which Wayne's untiring brain devised. The carriage came regularly every morning and off they rolled for the forenoon. Wayne, as cicerone, left nothing unvisited which could possibly be supposed to be worth looking at; and took care, on several occasions, that they should meet his friends and acquaintances to whom, with some pride and delight, he introduced

his friend. The city-bred youths stared politely, touched Will's hand after the most approved fashion, and secretly wondered "what country-cousin Wayne Shirwyn had brought to town?"

It was not strange that Will tired a little of this and longed to be at work. The boys to whom he had been introduced, hardly satisfied him with their unending talk about soirees, receptions, the new teams that were out, and the swell Alf Nelson was making with that new turn-out of his. He always turned from them to Wayne with a sigh of relief. If Wayne was a bit haughty and proud, he was not vain and conceited, and Will knew his heart. True, there was one exception — lame Sam Tryon — among his new acquintances, to whom Will turned instinctively with friendship and pity; but the others he cared nothing for. Now, longing to be at work,

and still feeling his resolution to be a great help to the dear, patient workers at home strong within him, he said to Wayne, "I've been an idler long enough. I'm really getting weary of pleasure, for a wonder. When do you think I can go to work?" Wayne shrugged his shoulders. "You're so horridly in earnest about everything you do!" said he; "why, you've only been here two weeks and you're tired of sight-seeing and pleasure, and ache to get running in your groove. Better not be in a hurry. You'll have to fag hard enough by and by to suit even you. Father will talk about work when he thinks you've had vacation enough."

"I hope he'll make the discovery pretty soon," said Will.

"O bother! why not enjoy yourself? There are lots of fellows you haven't seen yet, and plenty that you don't wish to see,

I suppose. What do you think Bob Haskell said of you? I won't tell you: and Sam Tryon, poor fellow, found a friend in you at first sight. And we haven't been out to see Tommy Brewster, either. Tom's father is a perfect Crœsus, and Tom's an only son — consequence: Tom spends money enough to support half-a-dozen families. You should see his horses. But you won't like him, though he's a pretty good-hearted fellow."

Will did not look at all tempted by this description, and Wayne laughed at the half-weary look that was in his face. "There's no use in trying to tempt you with the things our city-boys enjoy," he said, shaking his head; "what you want is work and books and your Saturday, now and then. And you're right," added Wayne, after a pause; "I get tired of it all! What good are we rich men's boys ever going to do?

Nobody would miss us any more than we miss the butterflies at autumn, and the world would go on just as well if we were out of it. But you! — well, if you'd rather go to work than see Tommy's horses, and all that sort of thing, I'll just drop a hint to father."

"Thank you," said Will, gratefully.

"Well, I deserve thanking," said Wayne, "for when you go to work I must go back to my books, and that's a sacrifice. These two weeks have been a perfect round of happy days — happier than I've known since I left you at Newland. But I thank *you* for that."

The next morning, at the breakfast table, Will received a pleasant invitation to go down to the office and take a look at the place which was henceforth to be the scene of his labor; and half an hour after breakfast, he started with Mr. Shirwyn, in the

single carriage that conveyed that gentleman to and from his place of business.

"Good-by, poor slave," said Wayne, as they parted at the gate; "go and be a wrinkled, dried-up goose-quill, like Barstow, down at the office."

Will knew what he meant as soon as they entered the counting-room, and the old head clerk came forward. He was a little, thin, yellow-faced man, who looked as if he had lived upon old ledgers all his life-time. His sharp, keen eyes, took in Will from head to foot, and looked him through and through the minute Mr. Shirwyn presented him.

"From the country, eh?" he said, still piercing Will with his eyes; "that's the kind of blood it takes to live in the counting-room. The less of your dull, sluggish city blood there is here, the better." Here Mr. Shirwyn drew the old clerk aside, and a low conversation followed in regard to

himself, Will knew well enough. The old man came back with something like a smile on his wrinkled countenance.

"So you and young Shirwyn are great friends, eh? That's right. Something ails young Shirwyn,— got something on his mind. You'd better find out what 'tis!" This abrupt declaration rather startled Will. He turned and looked, but Mr. Shirwyn had left the room "Yes," added the old clerk, looking at Will's puzzled face, "he's got something on his conscience. You'd better help him get it off. I'm used to boys more or less. Don't forget what I've told you. This way if you please."

This odd introduction to his work puzzled Will somewhat. What could Barstow know of Wayne? Why should he tell him to help him with his trouble? The old man's words had very little effect, until Will had been in the office two or three weeks and

BARSTON ADVISING WILL. Page 60.

discovered that the old clerk's keenness for reading character was to be depended upon, and that the wifeless and childless old man loved his employer and his family, as well as he did the spotlessness of his own reputation. He found, too, that Wayne had a warm place in his heart, as he did in everybody's who knew him. This set Will to thinking more deeply. He was conscious, though he had battled against the thought every day since his arrival, that there had surely been a change in his friend. In what respects he was not yet able to tell. Sometimes, in looking at Wayne's face when it was at rest, it seemed to him that something had been lost out of it. Was it its innocence? No! — he would never believe that. Wayne was not a criminal. But what was it? He could not tell.

As the pleasant excitement of their first weeks wore away, he found that Wayne's

manner was often restless and uneasy, in strange contrast to his old, careless, happy ways at school. But Will was not to be easily convinced that what Barstow had said might be true. What if Wayne was restless and troubled at times? It was not to be expected that he could always be light-hearted as a bird. Then, after thinking of the hundred little generous, noble acts, which Wayne performed unconsciously every day, he would laugh at himself and regret that he had ever remembered the old clerk's words.

As the Spring ripened into Summer, and Will became accustomed to his work, acquainted with his fellow-clerks, and a little less in awe of Barston's keen eyes, his enjoyment of this new life was almost perfect. He was supporting himself — that was a great delight — and already a little sum (large in the eyes of people who saw

little money) had gone home. Then there was the charm of the home which the Shirwyns gave him, the ceaseless source of joy and happiness. Their happiness and sorrow were his and his theirs. They included him in their plans and arrangements for Summer pleasure-trips, consulted his tastes and wishes, and made him feel that he was indeed a son and brother to them.

That all this kindness was owing to the gratitude which they felt toward Will, can hardly be affirmed. Some of it was the result of Will's own uprightness and manliness, which won friends and friendliness for him everywhere. Whatever was good and pure and chivalrous in him, added to the interest which the Shirwyns already felt, and served as a double reason why they should thus love him as their own.

When the Summer heats came on, there was a long consultation as to who should go

to the seashore, and who remain at home. Mrs. Shirwyn, Nina, and Mother Bunch were to go as a matter of course; about the three remaining members of the family there was some doubt. They were talking the matter over at the tea-table one evening, and Wayne, with the strangeness which had characterized him of late, had almost bluntly refused to go. Mr. Shirwyn had looked impatient.

"Wayne, my son, there are many reasons why I wish you to take this trip," he said. "I think it will do you good. You have looked very dull, lately. Will will go with you, of course, and I will follow as soon as business matters will permit."

"I thank you very much," said Will, quickly, "but I think I had better stay. I don't need rest at all."

"Oh, you old miser!" said Wayne from across the table; "then if Will is not going

neither am I, unless father commands me to.'"

An uncomfortable silence settled over the tea-table. At last Mrs. Shirwyn said, half turning to Will, "I wish Wayne to go very much. We want him brightened up. He has been in a dull, moping way lately. It troubles me."

Wayne flushed, and hurriedly said, "Mother's anxiety, you know, Will. You haven't noticed any such thing, have you?" Wayne looked keenly over the top of his tea-cup as he spoke.

To Will's infinite relief Mother Bunch saw fit to interpose a remark of her own at this point, and he was thus saved the pain of a reply. Then, crushing down his own regrets, he said, "If Wayne is going to excuse himself from going on my account, Mrs. Shirwyn, I'll thwart him by deciding to go with you."

Mrs. Shirwyn laughed and expressed her thanks. Mr. Shirwyn looked relieved, and Wayne frowned. But pretty soon a smile broke over his face and he said, gracefully bowing his head, "It's very good in you, Will. I'll remember it."

Then for the next week came the bustle of preparation, the packing of trunks with sea-side clothing, sea-side books, paper and linen for the sea-mosses, and all the dozens of articles necessary for a pleasant and successful trip to the sea. That he gave his consent to go unwillingly, Will disclosed to no one. That he was anxious and eager to be at work instead of spending a month or two by the sea he was careful to conceal, that the Shirwyns might not be troubled by thinking they carried an unwilling companion with them; nevertheless somebody discovered his secret. Wayne came to him in the midst of this bustle of preparation,

looking more like the Wayne of old than he had for many a day.

"Will," said he, "if you are so foolish as to wish to stay in this brick wilderness through the hot weather, do you suppose I'm going to prevent you?"

"Wayne!"

"Well?"

"You will go without me?"

"Yes, if you had rather stay. I release you from your promise."

"Willingly?"

"Yes, since you wish to stay. I was selfish the other night, and wanted to make somebody uncomfortable. Hope you'll enjoy your roasting—I expect to mine. Stop! I don't want to be thanked for anything. Good morning."

Will had started for the office. He went on his way now, wondering how he could ever doubt Wayne Shirwyn, or suspect that

his generous heart was heavy with the remembrance of evil committed.

So they departed without him, Wayne going in as docile a manner as could be wished. The long month and a half which they were absent, seemed three to Will after Mr. Shirwyn's departure. He breakfasted all alone in the great dining room, and supped there after his return from the office at night, with no one but the servants to exchange a word with. The delightful society to which he had been accustomed, made the present loneliness all the more oppressive by contrast. Once he went to see lame Sam Tryon, who made a pleasant evening for him, and begged him to come again.

But these days, otherwise so lonely, were brightened through and through by the recollection of what the money, earned by his self-denial, would do for the people up at the farm,— how it would lessen mother's

labor, and lighten father's toil through the hot, sweltering days, and make them all lighter of heart. And remembering this, he was glad and grateful and content.

By and by there came a letter from Wayne, announcing the time of their return. Something about this letter troubled Will. It was not a cheerful letter, but read as if the writer was finding his vacation intolerably dull and weary, and as if his spirit had neither grown brighter nor more hopeful.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW DOES NOT LESSEN.

THE Shirwyns returned on one golden evening in late Summer. Mrs. Baker, the housekeeper, had been busy all day in making preparations for their arrival, and as twilight fell the lights shone out all over the house, and the great rooms put on the look of brightness and elegance which Will had missed so long. The piano was open, waiting for Nina's fingers, the flowers came back to their brackets and mantels in the usual profusion, and the tea-table, no longer lonesome-looking with its service for one, sparkled and glittered and waited for the travellers.

Will heard the carriage when it rolled up to the gate, and was at the door to welcome them. Mother Bunch, with her usual alertness, was the first to get out, and after stumbling up all the steps in her eagerness, succeeded in tumbling Will's hair over his eyes, and half-smothering him with her vehement kisses. Then came Mrs. Shirwyn, with her bright smile and motherly kiss, and her quiet, "We have missed you more than I can tell, Will." Nina followed, bright and radiant as ever, and then came Wayne. Mr. Shirwyn had stopped at his office.

Will could hardly conceal his disappointment as he took his friend's hand and looked at his wearied, listless face. It was evident at once that the change had done Wayne no good. For a minute, as he greeted Will, the old color and animation came back to his face, and he exclaimed, "This does me more good than all the sea-side in the world!

If you knew how I longed to be back here and with you! — Bah! I hate the sea."

Shortly after, Mr. Shirwyn entered, and after the travellers had shaken off the dust and dinginess of their long ride, they sat down to tea. Wayne hardly spoke in the midst of all their cheerful talk about the journey, the sea, the friends they had met and the sights they had seen. All these events had evidently given him no pleasure, and he seemed to have forgotten them already.

At last, Mr. Shirwyn, as he finished a long account to Will of a yacht-race, looked up and said, — a shadow of anxiety on his brow — "But all our attempts at chasing the gloom, or whatever it may be, from Wayne's face, have proved useless. I think he had better stayed at home. Cannot you help us, Will?"

"I can, if Wayne will let me," said Will, looking across the table at his friend.

Wayne colored and frowned. "How do you know you can help me?" he said in a sharp, vexed tone. "I don't want any help. I don't need any."

Mrs. Shirwyn sighed. "I have not been able to find that he is ill or discontented or longing for a change," she said; "but still he cared nothing for boating or fishing, nor anything, in fact, except to lie on the rocks and gaze in the water."

"And he only made one sketch for me," said Nina, "when last year he used to go out every day."

"I dare say there are a hundred other things you can find to bring against me," said Wayne, bitterly. "It is very pleasant to sit and hear them. Can I be excused?"

Permission being given, Wayne left the table. Mr. Shirwyn turned to Will almost in despair. "It is very strange," he said; "Wayne has always been cheerful and light-

hearted until — really, I cannot tell when the change began. I only know that he is not the same Wayne, and that this trouble saddens all our lives."

It did sadden their lives. This evening of their return, which should and might have been so happy, was robbed of its perfectness by Wayne's absence from their circle. Nina was in her old familiar place at the piano, but the charm of her music could not dispel the shadow which had fallen upon them.

When Will went up to his room, Wayne was lying upon the sofa and could not be prevailed upon to go to bed, so that much against his inclination he was compelled to leave him there. When he awoke in the morning, Wayne was still on the sofa, having fallen into a troubled sleep, wherein he stirred and muttered and looked so oppressed, that Will was fain to drop two or three books

with a little crash and awaken him. Wayne looked around, his great eyes wild and fearful, and it was not until they fell upon Will that their calmness came back. Will felt, then, as if he would never rest until he had gained possession of this troubling secret which was eating all Wayne's peace and comfort away. But whenever any approach to the subject was made, Wayne repelled him.

After the return of the Shirwyns, and as the seekers after health, rest, or pleasure came back to the city in the pleasant Fall weather, the young people,—perhaps longing for the gayety of the Summer — began a round of parties and sociables which Wayne and Nina usually attended,— the givers generally being their own personal friends. The invitations at first ignored Will, more for the reason that he had evinced no inclination to enter the young folks' society

than from any motive. But Wayne, with his usual regard for his friend, steadily refused to attend every party, reception or sociable to which Will had not received an invitation, too; until the circle of his friends suddenly discovered the reason for his mysterious absence, and never failed to include Will Rood in their invitations. Will, however, rarely attended,— partly from want of inclination, and partly from the consciousness that he and those gay, butterfly boys and girls had nothing in common. They belonged to the play-day side of life,— he to the work-day.

But when it came the Shirwyns' turn to give an evening entertainment, of course he, as one of the family, was to be present. For all the preparations that had been made, the family seemed to expect little pleasure from the event. This was owing to Wayne, who had been in unusually gloomy spirits

for several days, and refused to take the slightest interest in what was going forward, though the party was to be given in his name. When the evening came and it was time for the guests to arrive, Wayne plead sudden illness and begged Will to go down and with Nina receive the company. Will, after long hesitation, at last assented, seeing that Wayne would not stir until inclination prompted him. But when the guests had nearly all arrived, there began to be many and repeated enquiries as to Wayne's absence,— whether his illness was serious or only a headache, and whether he was too ill to see his friends. Nina came to Will with a perturbed face.

"Do beg him to come down," she said; "everybody is enquiring for him, and the whole party will be a failure unless he comes. If he won't yield to you I will go and see him." Will hurried up to their

room. The gas was burning but dimly, and the moonlight streamed across the floor. Wayne was standing in front of one of the long windows, his straight figure and handsome face outlined against the mild glow of the dead sunset. Will touched his shoulder and said, "Come, my dear Wayne, they are all calling for you down below. You won't spoil all the enjoyment for us?"

Wayne turned with a look in his eyes that showed how far off were his thoughts of what was going on below, and looked at Will steadily for a minute. Then he said, slowly, "You said you could help me with my trouble, if I would let you. Will you?"

"O, Wayne!" cried Will, in delighted astonishment, "if you would only let me try!" He sat down on the bed's edge and pulled Wayne down beside him. "Now tell me all," he said, eagerly, "and your secret shall be mine and I will share the weight of

it with you. I know it's not a trouble without a remedy, and when you have told it, it won't wear upon you so. O, Wayne! if you had only come to this before." Wayne hesitated. "Don't hesitate," said Will, courageously, "for what have you to tell that I ought not to hear? Why, at school you told me all the mischief you had got into before you slept upon it. Now what—"

"O, that I had stayed at school with you until you came!" exclaimed Wayne, with a voice full of sadness, "then all this trouble would not have been upon me."

Wayne had said this a great many times already, but it was no less a mystery to Will. He waited patiently for his friend to begin, but no sound came from Wayne's lips.

"Are you afraid of me?" said Will, reproachfully.

Wayne's lips moved as if he was about

to begin his story, but all sound died away. Some sad, sweet music floated up from the parlors and filled the room. Wayne shivered. Then he got up, resolutely.

"I can't tell you!" he said, excitedly walking back and forth. "I thought the struggle was over when you came in, but I haven't the courage to tell you anything that will lower me in your eyes — never! I'll let the secret wear me out first. O, my good friend, don't blame me! — don't blame me! You don't know what it is to be weak and uncertain."

The tears of disappointment flashed into Will's eyes. "I don't blame you," he said, gravely; "but I am afraid we shall both be sorry for this."

They were. Wayne's golden opportunity had passed.

"Well," said Will, after a long silence, "we had better go down."

Wayne did not object, and pulled Will's arm within his own, saying, "That is Sam Tryon's playing. His music always makes one's heart ache. Come, let us go down and be merry. If you weren't in this house of ours, I'd fly thousands of miles away. Something tells me that you'll be my salvation by and by. Ah — here they come. How are you, Tom? Good evening, Miss Brewster."

Wayne always made a stir when he entered a room filled with young people, and Will would have liked a less conspicuous position; but Wayne held him fast, and took him from one group to another, introducing him to new acquaintances, and stopping at last at the piano where lame Sam Tryon sat. Sam's health failing day by day, made him unable to attend but few of the entertainments of his friends, though he was a general favorite, and his presence was desired

everywhere, and looking at his white face, and his thin hands that were running over the keys, Wayne whispered to Will, "Poor Sam isn't to be with us a great while longer. What a good thing it would be if we could change places, and have one good-for-something stay in the world and a good-for-nothing go out of it!"

"Perhaps it would," said Will, "if you have made the same preparation for going that Sam has."

Wayne here gave up his friend to Sam, and Will saw little of him for the rest of the evening, though he noted that he seemed to be carrying his part of the entertainment as gracefully as of old.

When the guests were all gone, Nina said gratefully to Will, "You are the David that charms our Saul. Wayne did splendidly, and when I asked him what had come over him, he said, 'Will.' How do you calm him so?"

Will could not tell. But that night, after Wayne had thrown himself, sleepy and worn out, on the bed, and was breathing in slumber, Will knelt down and prayed for him,—all his yearning, anxiety and desire, struggling up from his heart in one eager, appealing cry for God to save Wayne! — to save him from the haunting evil that was consuming his life, to break his pride that held back confession, and to arrest the evil which, it seemed to Will, was hovering over them. When a boy puts his troubles in God's hands, he can know that a father, whose love is unfathomable, guides him with kindness and pity, so sure and tender and unfailing, that the love and forethought of all earthly fathers fade to the merest nothing in comparison.

The next morning, at the office, Mr. Shirwyn came up to Will's desk, looking troubled and anxious. Will knew that he had come

to talk of Wayne before he spoke, and was not surprised to hear him say, "My dear boy, I want you to do me a great favor. I know that you will be willing to, for Wayne is as dear to you as to the rest of us, and it is for his good. I want you to ascertain the cause of his trouble. We *must* know. This thing is wearing all the life and spirit out of him. Wayne, I think, will confess to you what he will reveal to no one else. If you can succeed in this matter—" Mr. Shirwyn paused, and finally added, "it will be another unpayable debt added to what we already owe you." Will related what had already passed between himself and Wayne, and though not at all confident of success, promised to do his best in the matter, and went home that night thinking deeply about it.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM TROUBLE TO TROUBLE.

WHEN Will entered the hall he found Wayne there, leaning against the carved post of the balusters, and looking so cold and gloomy that he despaired at once of being successful in his undertaking. Hardly had he closed the door behind him, when Nina entered, smiling and radiant.

"Look," she exclaimed, holding up a thick envelope; "see what Blecker has just brought us. Now you shall guess what it contains, Wayne and Will!"

"A request to help in Mrs. Bonner's charity-fair?" said Will.

"No, indeed."

"An invitation to somebody's soiree," said Wayne, wearily.

"No, better than that! It's Hugh Storer's birth-day to-morrow, and instead of the usual party in the evening, they have chartered a boat and given invitations to twenty to go up the river with them and have a dinner in the woods, and so come home by moonlight. Won't it be delightful? The woods are turning, nuts are ripe, there will be music and a splendid full moon, and it all seems so delightful! To think that Blecker should carry the invitations around in his pocket for three days! A little longer and it would have been too late."

Nina gave Will the invitation to read, saying,

"Don't refuse this time. It's a great while since you've accepted a single invitation. Won't you go?"

"Yes, if I can be spared at the office," said Will.

"And you will go, of course, Wayne?"

"No. I shall not go of course," said Wayne; "I shall decline."

"Wayne!" said Nina, in astonishment; "you aren't in earnest?"

"Yes. I am not going."

"Don't say that," said Will; "we shall not wish to go without you, and the river, air and the woods will do you good."

"You and Nina can go, just as well, without me. I'm tired of the whole round of parties and excursions. I hate them! And I'm not going."

"But Hugh is your friend," said Nina, with a voice full of disappointment.

"Then he will forgive me for not going," said Wayne. "For go I shall not."

Here the tea-bell called them from the hall. Directly after tea, Wayne went up to his room, where Will soon followed him, intent upon fulfilling his promise to Mr.

Shirwyn. Wayne had pulled the sofa from its place, and pushed it against one of the high, wide windows, where he could lie and look out upon the wide reach of sunset sky, now fading into misty, delicate hues, through which a solitary star twinkled. He looked up with a shadow of annoyance on his face as Will entered, but still beckoned him to come and sit beside him. Will sat down, at a loss how to commence upon the dreaded subject, and his eyes, slowly wandering around the room, made the discovery that the lovely little marble head was gone from its bracket.

"Why, Wayne," he exclaimed, on the impulse of the moment, "our marble is gone. Do you see? — the bracket is empty." The room was not light enough to reveal the crimson that flushed Wayne's cheeks.

"But it was there this morning," said Will, "for I remember my eyes fell upon it

when I awoke. Don't you remember I said it looked ready to speak? Sleepy, Wayne?"

Wayne slowly raised himself up — at bay. His eyes shone with excitement, and his words came with a vehemence that sounded oddly enough from him.

"No, I'm not sleepy," he said, "and am not like to be. What I've got to say may as well come first as last. The marble is gone, and we shall never see it again; and I tell you I won't be dogged and haunted till I'm worried into telling where it's gone to! If you look on the mantel I dare say you'll find the silver vases are gone too,— they went before the head. What is it to you? I *won't* be worried and troubled so! I tell you I won't, I *won't*, I WON'T!" He brought his foot down with a stamp that jarred the room.

Will, for the moment, completely bereft of his wits by this outburst, sat silent and mo-

tionless. Wayne rose to his feet, walked haughtily to the door, and went out without another word. After he had gone, Will sat in the dusk, disposed at first to be indignant; then his indignation softened into pity and a desire to seek Wayne at once, and heal this sudden, one-sided quarrel before it grew any greater. Poor Wayne was not himself, he thought, and he would find him and beg him to reveal what was wearing out his very life, and marring the happiness of all his friends.

With this thought uppermost, and in his generousness remembering only Wayne's good, he ran down stairs to find him. The conservatory was silent and shadowy, and there was no one there. In the parlors the chandeliers were all ablaze, flooding the rooms with light, but no one sat there. The house seemed very empty. He entered the great, dimly-lighted library, and had got half

its length before he discovered that it had occupants. But there was one who had been watching him all the time. It was Wayne, with eyes still angry, looking from the great chair where he had thrown himself. Nina was sitting beside him, and had evidently been holding his head and endeavoring to soothe his anger. Will, sorry that he had thus come upon them, turned back; but it was too late. Wayne's fiery spirit had caught and blazed.

"Wait!" said he, imperiously, stamping with anger, "you shall hear. I *hate* you! I despise you! You —"

"O, Wayne! Wayne!" Nina screamed, "what are you saying? — Wa —"

"Nina, be *still*! I want him to hear. He dogs my steps, he spies out everything I do. I can't call my conscience my own. He follows me everywhere and I hate him! I *hate* him, and I won't bear it any longer."

Wayne paused, breathless with his own fierce wrath. Nina threw her arms about him, beseechingly, and cried, "O Wayne, don't talk so! Don't listen to it, Will,— he don't mean it, he never could talk to you like that in his senses. He is sick — troubled — O Wayne, what have you said? Tell him you don't mean it — quick!"

"I do mean it," said Wayne, haughtily; "I want him to leave the room now — this instant — or I'll call Blecker. I won't look at him!"

"I shall not trouble you to do that," said Will, and with Nina beseeching him to come back, he turned and went out. Nina burst into tears as the door closed, and buried her face in the sofa-pillows.

Now this sister of Wayne's was very dear to him, and nothing could touch him more than the knowledge that he had caused her pain. So, after about ten minutes of silence, Wayne said,

"Don't be foolish, Nina."

No response but sobs. Another ten minutes passed.

"Nina, don't be silly. I didn't mean to hurt you. I didn't know you would be frightened. There, dear, don't cry."

He left his chair and tried to raise her head, kissed her hair, told her that she was making him pain, and begged her to say she forgave him. But his entreaties availed nothing. At last he cried out, desperately,

"Nina, *will* you speak to me? If you aren't going to, I'm going off. I can't stand this. Have I offended you too deeply to ever be forgiven? Nina!"

"You are not Wayne," she said, tremulously.

This offended him at first, but the more he thought of it the more its truth oppressed him, till he left her and went back to his chair where he sat sadly down.

It would take too long to tell how the reconciliation was effected, but a little while after this, Nina was crying hysterically on Wayne's shoulder, and begging him for all their sakes to repent of what he had done, before it was too late.

"Too late?" said Wayne; "why too late?"

Nina looked up, spiritedly.

"You insulted him," she said; "you — who brought him here, who declared that you shared everything with him, and that he was more than a brother to you — you turned upon your friend, insulted him, and drove him from the room. O, Wayne, how could you say those words?"

Here Nina broke down.

Wayne made no defense, his face settling down into such worn, haggard lines, and withal so sorrowful, that Nina's heart was melted.

"Dear Wayne," she said, tenderly, looking searchingly into his great hazel eyes, "if you would only let me help you bear this."

He shook his head, despairingly. "What do you suppose I was born for?" he said. "I'm just an idle, useless thing, doing no good, and dragging my friends into trouble and abusing them. I don't wonder that poor, idle wretches go and drown themselves. I can feel why they do it."

"Wayne!"

"I can. The other day, when Ben Southard was buried, and all we fellows of his acquaintance went to look our last at him, I did not feel like shedding any tears as the others did. I envied him — lying there so calm and untroubled — and when the minister spoke of his being cut off in the flower of his youth, I thought to myself it was a lucky thing for Ben."

Nina laid her white, shocked face against

her brother's, with no heart to upbraid him. "Think," she said, gently, "of what you may be to all of us — father, mother and the rest."

"Yes, think of what I might have been!" said Wayne, with bitter vehemence, "but what I can never be, now."

Nina's startled, "Why? Why, Wayne?" received no reply.

A little later, Will, who had thrown himself upon the bed in his room, was called from the whirl of indignation and sorrow that filled his heart, by a soft tap at the door. Nina stood there. Her eyes were suffused with tears, and at first she did not speak. At last she said, tremulously, "Can you ever forgive Wayne?"

Will was silent for a full minute, his heart going out with yearning toward Wayne, but still swelling with the remembrance of Wayne's indignities. He knew

what was right in the matter, but the insolence of "I despise you!" still rankled.

Nina trembled. She had seen Will roused once. She put her little soft hand on his arm, and said, chokingly, "I beg it of you — for all our sakes. I would not ask you if I did not know that Wayne was sorry. He has repented,— I *know* that,— and it would almost kill papa to know what he said to you. I'm afraid he would never forgive Wayne; and if you could be friends once more — if you *can* forgive him — we can all try to be happy again." Still Will made no response. "He is in the library," faltered Nina, "and will come up if you will let him."

"No; I will go down to him," said Will.

They went down together. If Wayne could be haughty and imperious when angry, he could also be humble enough when really penitent. As they entered, his

figure — half bowed — was so expressive of contrition — there was such sorrowfulness and hopelessness about it, that Will's heart smote him, and instead of waiting for Wayne's apologies, he was the first to speak.

"Wayne," he cried, "don't look like that! We are friends. Tell him I forget it all, Nina, — tell him we're just the same as if it had never happened. Why, Wayne, how ridiculous to think we could be enemies!"

Will spoke as if his heart refused to comprehend such a fact.

Nina mentally blessed him for these words, while she whispered, "Have you nothing to say to him, Wayne?"

Wayne shivered.

"I don't know," he said, wearily. "If I am forgiven, who can tell but that I shall be just as bad in another fit of vexation? Will, I'm a brute! If you weren't Will Rood, I don't know how you would ever bear with me."

He choked here and could say no more. Will forgave him from the bottom of his heart, with no reservations.

"Will," said Wayne, after a long silence, "if you have taken me back into your heart, I shall try to keep there. God knows I mean it."

He covered his face and smothered the groan that struggled up. What had he come to? This secret evil had eaten away all his happiness and comfort, till there was no peace left for him. Looking back to the time before the evil was committed, and remembering his lightness of heart and happiness, he could see how the shadow had grown over all his joy and best impulses, till now he had been heaping abuse and insult upon this faithful, great-hearted friend of his. There was nobleness enough in Wayne's heart to make him suffer keenly for this. Just now it seemed as if death and rest in

the cool, friendly brown bosom of the earth, would be infinite joy compared with his present state.

But the end was not to be yet. This burden was to be dragged around as long as life was his, unless — he confessed his trouble and received pity and help. But he could never do that — never! He could see the shocked faces of his friends, their grief and amazement, their — Oh, no! he would never confess it! — never! never! If death came, the secret should die with him, and they would never suspect.

Will came to him from where he had been standing and said,

"It's a beautiful, cool evening. Come out a little while, Wayne; it will do you good."

Wayne looked up with an effort.

"There are some books father spoke of yesterday," he said; "we can walk down

town and get them. It will be good exercise."

"But is there time?" said Will, a little surprised.

Wayne looked at his watch and replied,

"It is only eight. We can be back in an hour and a half."

As he seemed desirous of going, Will assented. Wayne rose from his chair, kissed Nina affectionately, saying, "I don't know what becomes of these fellows without sisters," and bidding her have the chess-boards ready, in case they returned early, set out with Will.

CHAPTER VII.

WILL ROOD'S FORGERY.

THE books were ordered and the two friends started homeward. Wayne seemed in brighter spirits. They were loitering slowly along in the bright light of the shop windows, waiting for a car to overtake them, when Will became conscious that a heavy step was following them,— stopping when they stopped, slowly but surely dogging them when they moved on. He looked over his shoulder and saw a flashily-dressed man a little way behind. Wayne did not notice. To discover whether this was the individual with the slow, heavy step, Will stopped altogether before a shop window, engaging

Wayne's attention by something within. The man passed on and paused before a window a little way on, where he stood gazing in till they passed by him. Then he followed on. Will thought it a little singular, for the man was not drunk. But here he heard the tinkle of the car bell and saw its light coming down behind them.

"Here's the car," he said to Wayne.

"That's lucky," said Wayne, "for I'm tired of walking."

The man at their heels heard. His steps quickened, and before Will had time to look around he was beside them and his hand came down heavily on Wayne's shoulder.

"Sorry," said he, in a cool, pitiless voice, "but you'll have to miss the car. I've a little something to say first."

"What right have you to hinder us?" demanded Will, roused by the insolence of the man's tone.

"A right that your friend, here, understands," said the insolent voice; "he won't think of disputing it."

Will turned to his friend, expecting to see him resent this speech with spirit; but looking, a sudden fear filled his heart. Wayne was trembling like a leaf in the wind. His face, without much color of late, was snowy white, his lips trembled as if power to speak was gone, and he leaned heavily on Will.

"Wayne," said Will, as soon as he could speak, "here is the car — just ahead of us. Come — quick — we will go home!"

Wayne put up his hand. "No — no," he said, faintly, "I must stay. You can go,— I want you to go!" Will only stood the closer by his friend. The car, with its bells and lamps and heads at the windows, rumbled by.

"Better stand back a little," said the man

to Will; "I want a word in private with this fellow."

Will turned his back upon the speaker. "Don't tremble so, Wayne," he entreated; "let me stand by you. This insolent fellow ought not to be listened to. Whatever he has to say, let him say it to both of us."

"O, Will," said Wayne, beseechingly, "if you care for me, don't stand here. Don't hear what he says,— don't stay a minute longer, I beg you. I would rather be alone with him."

Will withdrew to a neighboring lamp-post, within the sound of their voices, but too far to hear what was said. Some anxious, fearful thoughts — almost suspicions — floated through his mind. A ray of light, struggling through a half-closed shutter, fell upon the man's face as he talked, so that its every expression was read by Will, as he waited in a fever of indignation and anxiety. It

was a face that had known evil for a long time,— the face of a man with whom, it was not to be supposed, any event of Wayne Shirwyn's life could ever have brought him in contact. Yet Wayne trembled and shrank before him!

This made Will fearful. Could his friend really be in the power of this vulgar, overdressed, insolent man? What could he have done? Oh, if he might only know the truth! He looked at the two figures, his heart swelling with indignation at the man's overbearing, insolent manner, and hardly restraining himself from rushing to Wayne and pulling him away. His friend — the friend whom he had so loved and admired and exulted in — cowering before this evil-eyed, depraved gambler or pickpocket. O, what shame! The hot tears, born of anger and pity, filled Will's eyes. He felt as if it was unfaithful to stand by and not endeavor

to break this man's snare; yet Wayne had tied his hands, refused to confide in him, and how could he help?

The conference was not very lengthy. With a warning, "Remember, it all depends on you!" that reached Will's ears, the man turned back down the street, and Wayne stood alone. There was a look in his white face that frightened Will.

"O Wayne!" he cried, "if you had only let me stayed with you! Why *don't* you trust me? Are you faint? Wayne! for heaven's sake speak, and not look at me so!"

Wayne shuddered.

"Come, we will go home," he said.

Will hesitated.

"Have you nothing to tell me — nothing to explain, now?"

"No, nothing," said Wayne, shivering from head to foot; "let us go home."

They walked on as fast as Wayne was

able, — walking silently, for Will was conscious that the friend by his side was suffering as he had never seen him suffer before. As they neared home, Wayne said,

"I can't see Nina to-night, nor the others. Will you make it all right to them for me? I'm going up to our room."

Will promised.

Neither Mrs. Shirwyn nor Nina seemed to suspect that anything was wrong, and as it was late, Will excused himself, and went up stairs too.

Wayne laid himself down on the sofa with a groan, and instead of shunning Will, seemed to desire his presence.

"Come and sit down here," he faltered; "I want to ask you something."

He raised himself up on one elbow, his eyes shining with excitement, as Will sat down by him.

"Now answer me truly, for you don't

know how much it means to me! If you were driven to that spot where you had either got to commit an evil to hide another, or expose what you had done, and so destroy all your happiness and good prospects, and those of your friends, which would you choose between? Would you hide the evil by committing another, or would you confess all the shame, evil and disgrace?"

Wayne trembled violently when he had finished.

"Why," said Will, in some perturbation at this strange question, "that is a trial which comes to few. If one has done wrong, one's friends do not fall off if they are faithful. They pity and forgive. But I think there is only one right way — to confess the evil. Then the trouble can live no longer."

"But," said Wayne, in a sharp voice, "if this confession disgraces you, if it

lowers you in your friends' eyes, if it puts you down to a level with thieves and gamblers and blacklegs — what then?"

"It is right just the same," said Will, trembling himself this time.

Wayne groaned and said no more. Will sat by him, patiently hoping that he would get the courage to reveal his trouble; but he hoped against hope. Then Wayne feigned slumber, and feigned it so well, that Will thought him sound asleep, and went to bed; but when the room had settled into dreamy quietness, the figure on the sofa stirred, opened its eyes and was broad awake.

O, the weariness of that night!—the long, long, sleepless hours, the dread of coming day, the tormenting consciousness that with the morrow's coming came the hour wherein he was to choose between confession and a deeper plunge into evil!

When Will awoke in the morning, Wayne lay so worn and weary, that he had no heart to refer to any of the events of the previous evening, and promising to send Blecker up with some breakfast, he went down to his own.

It was nothing very unusual for Wayne to be absent from the breakfast table, and no one seemed to think very much of it, with the exception of Nina, who followed Will to the door, as he started for the office.

"Is it Wayne's trouble still?" she asked.

"Yes. He is worn and tired this morning, and I don't believe he slept much last night. Perhaps you can persuade him to look brighter by and by."

"I shall try," said Nina; "and you have not forgotten the excursion this afternoon? Hugh will be offended unless some of us go."

"Wayne will hardly be fit," said Will; "I think I will come back at noon, if Barstow is not in too much of a hurry. Perhaps we can persuade Wayne, when he finds we are both going."

"Oh, thank you," said Nina, radiantly; "good-by till noon."

Now it chanced that Will was in Mr. Shirwyn's private office that forenoon, engaged upon some copying. Mr. Shirwyn was absent from the city, so that he was quite alone, save an occasional interruption from Barstow. Nothing could have been more favorable for the evil that was coming.

Toward noon, when Will was thinking of the proposed excursion, the door opened and Wayne entered. Will did not conceal his surprise. "And how much better you are looking!" he exclaimed; "I am glad, for now you can go up the river with us. It will do you good."

Wayne sat down, languidly. "I am not going up the river," he said. "Perhaps I look better than I feel."

"But Nina is very anxious to have you go," said Will.

"Pshaw!" laughed Wayne, with an attempt at the old gayety. "That's no reason for my going! Nina had a great deal rather have you for an escort. What a handy fellow you are with a pen," he added, after watching Will's smoothly-gliding pen for a moment. He was silent a minute. In that minute, tempted of the Devil, and seeing all things favorable, he yielded himself up — vanquished. "I wish I had half your skill!" he said. "Can you imitate other persons' hands?"

Will, glad to find his friend in so talkative a mood, and willing to humor him, took up an envelope — half-covered with the big handwriting of some business man — and dashed off an imitation.

"Ah — I thought you could!" said Wayne, with a flush on his cheek which Will did not observe; "but there's one you can't copy — father's. It's queer and straight."

"Let's see," said Will, with a twinkle of his eyes, but before he had made a stroke, Wayne interposed with a clean, fresh sheet of paper.

"It will look best on there," he said; "but you can't do it, Will,— you really can't."

I think that at that moment and in his heart, Wayne Shirwyn hoped his friend could not do it. But it was a frail hope to cling to, and it failed him. Will took down a book in which was Mr. Shirwyn's signature, and bent over his task, using the utmost care and pains. Wayne looked on, with cheeks in which the color was coming and going.

"There!" said Will, with a bit of triumph in his voice, as he made the last stroke," "what do you think of that?"

"Perfection itself!" said Wayne, really surprised; "I couldn't tell it from father's own."

At this instant Will chanced to look at the clock. "Five minutes of twelve!" he exclaimed; "why, I must go this moment, or I shall be late. I came near forgetting myself." With this he jumped off his high chair, hastily putting his pen in its place, and picking up the bits of paper which Wayne and he had scattered over the desk.

"Never mind all that litter," said Wayne, holding the bit of paper with his father's signature. "I'll take care of that after you're gone."

"Thank you," said Will, gratefully. "I *am* in a hurry." He took down his cap to go. When it was on his head and his hand was turning the door-knob, Wayne suddenly came up, his eyes full of tears. "Wayne!—What *is* the matter?" ejaculated Will.

Wayne bit his lips as if vexed with himself. "I'm a fool!" he said, abruptly, and turned away. Then, as if he could *not* smother what his heart was aching to say, he came back and said, sorrowfully, "Don't think hard of me, Will, whatever happens!"

"Of course not," said Will, wonderingly; "why should I do that?" He waited three or four seconds for Wayne to say something more, but as he was silent, closed the door behind, and went down the long salesroom and out into the street, bright with autumn sunshine. He had already forgotten copying Mr. Shirwyn's signature, and his hurried walk, and the bustle of departure up the river, effaced all remembrance of Wayne's actions for the time, at least.

When Will and Nina returned from up the river, late in the pleasant, moonshiny evening, they found Wayne awaiting them in the library. He looked brighter than usual

and appeared to take much interest in the lively, glowing account of the afternoon's pleasure, which Nina gave in her charming manner.

Sitting there beside Wayne, her handsome face all aglow with delight and love at finding her brother so cheerful, and the leaves and wood-berries that had been twined in her hair drooping over her forehead and neck, as she bent every few moments to look into Wayne's face, and laugh at somebody's mishap, the youth who sat the other side of the room thought her a model sister, and wondered if Mabel would ever be like her.

CHAPTER VIII.

A THUNDERBOLT FROM CLEAR SKY.

AFTER this the days went on much as usual,—calm, sunny, autumnal days, that showered their brightness even into the city's cold heart. Wayne seemed to be gradually recovering his lost lightness of heart, and, though often oppressed with strange fits of gloom and despondency, was certainly more cheerful and sociable than he had been through the Summer.

Quick to perceive this change, the family rejoiced and took new hope. Their old, happy, buoyant-hearted Wayne was coming back to them. Now the shadows which had made all the Summer sad, would flee away.

But Will, who knew more of Wayne's trouble than the others, though disposed to hail with joy any sign of returning peace and happiness to his friend's heart, could not feel quite at ease.

Wayne's trouble, whatever it might be, certainly seemed to be lessened, but that it was gone entirely, Will did not believe. He was too often sad and depressed to have a perfectly clear conscience, and very often, in his most despairing moods, he would haunt Will all the evening, manifesting unusual regard and affectionateness, and often begging him to remain his friend whatever happened. Though at the moment this seemed nothing, Will presently had occasion to remember it all.

Quite early one morning, a few minutes after Will had taken his place at the desk, Barstow came to him with a troubled look on his wrinkled, yellow old face.

"Mr. Shirwyn would like to see you a few minutes in the private office," he said, looking Will through and through with those wonderful eyes of his; "you had better go in at once."

Thinking only of Wayne, and the request which Mr. Shirwyn had once made, Will slid off his chair and entered the little room. Mr. Shirwyn sat at his secretary with a great litter of papers and letters before him, and in one hand he held a bit of crumpled paper. The cold, stern, silent scrutiny which Will met, surprised him, but he bore it bravely. How could he shrink when he had done nothing of which to feel guilty?

The two looked at each other silently for a minute, — Will's face simply surprised and wondering, Mr. Shirwyn's struggling between its usual kindness and the unusual expression of sternness. At last Will said,

"You sent for me, sir.?"

"Yes," said the merchant with an effort, "I want you to look at this."

He opened his hands as he spoke, and smoothed out the bit of paper. Will stepped forward, still wondering, and looked. It was a check for quite a large amount, upon which the money had been drawn. There was nothing unusual in its appearance, and with a puzzled air, Will said as much.

Mr. Shirwyn looked at him in doubt. "Please look again," he said, after a pause; "look closely."

Will bent over the paper, examining everything minutely. Not a letter was passed by, and he came to the signature, still wondering what all this strange procedure meant. But suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, the color all flew out of his face, he threw up his hands with a quick gesture of horror, and then the whole

awful truth — Wayne's complicity and guilt, Wayne's faithlessness and his own implication in the evil — came down upon him with mountain-weight, and he stumbled backward into a chair, feeling, for the first time in his life, as if he was going to faint.

There was nothing but pity in Mr. Shirwyn's face. He brought a glass of water, and waited for Will to recover a little from the shock. Then he said, his voice fairly trembling with agitation, "You acknowledge forging this signature?"

Will shuddered at the words, but answered, "Yes, I did it." Mr. Shirwyn groaned and turned away his head. He had hoped and prayed that the boy might vindicate himself. Here was a confession of guilt at the outset.

A sudden thought flashed into Will's heart. Was it possible that his employer thought him guilty of taking the amount

which the check represented? He looked up, the hot color flushing his face, and his voice ringing out clear and full as he said, "Mr. Shirwyn, do you think I have taken your money?"

The merchant looked at him, sorrowfully. "The money has been drawn," he said; "the signature was very successfully done."

Will's eyes sparkled. "I forged your name," he said, "but I have never taken one penny that was not my own — not one! Can't you trust me?"

"So there was an accomplice!" said Mr. Shirwyn, in surprise, and wondering at the boy's frankness. "O, Will! what would I have given if this had never happened!" He turned away his head again.

"But," faltered Will, touched by his employer's emotion, "you will believe that I have never taken your money? You will trust me in that?"

"Then who did take it?" demanded Mr. Shirwyn. Will was silent. It seemed to him that God could not have given him a harder trial. Wayne had been faithless to him. Should he be faithless to Wayne?

In the fierceness of his temptation to expose Wayne and clear his own name from all dishonor, he struggled to remember what was best for them all. If Wayne was left to repent, and make a confession of his own free will, would it not be better than to expose his evil and have the whole mysterious circumstances of his trouble brought forcibly to light? What would be best for Wayne? What would be best for all these people who had been such friends to him,— to save them pain, or give them trouble?

"If you did not take the money, who did?" repeated Mr. Shirwyn.

Wayne's name struggled up to his lips, but he crushed it down and was silent.

"Ah," said the merchant, sadly, "I would give ten times the amount of the forgery, to put you back in the old place in my heart. It's not the money I care for — I forgive you that — but the deception! the deception! We have trusted in you so, we have made you such a son and brother — Well, it will do no good to mourn over what has happened. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"Mr. Shirwyn," said Will, with as much calmness as possible, with such a whirl in his heart, "I have never taken or thought of taking one penny that did not belong to me. Nor have I wronged you intentionally."

"Then who *has* wronged me?" said Mr. Shirwyn, impatiently; "tell me that!"

"I can never tell you," said Will; "I can only ask you to trust me and believe what I say."

Mr. Shirwyn groaned, believing that the

boy was trying to evade conviction by further deception.

"I trusted you like my own son," he said, reproachfully; "you had grown dear to me like my own, and I had built many plans for your good. So had we all, and you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have destroyed the happiness of our family, for the present, by your conduct."

Will shivered with pain. They had all been so good to him! Now, how ungrateful he must seem to them. Oh, could he bear this trial?—bear it for their sakes? Boys who have God for a guide, find other strength than their own in the hour of trouble. Will clung desperately to his decision to spare Wayne and suffer in patience.

"But," continued Mr. Shirwyn, sternly, rising from his chair, "since you have chosen evil for your part, you must abide by the decision. All this will remain a

secret outside of my own family and Barstow, for you are young and I do not want to ruin your character. I forgive you the loss of the money — but the rest I cannot forgive. Henceforth you must be a stranger to us — a perfect stranger."

You may imagine how Will suffered, hearing this. Every word cut him to the heart. He seemed perfectly crushed by the blow. Looking at him the tears came into Shirwyn's eyes, but he nerved himself to be stern and impartial.

"I favor you thus," he said, in a less hard-tone, "partly for Wayne's sake, partly for your own, and remembering what you have been to all of us. If Wayne was in your situation — if it was possible for him to fall thus — I should want some one to be lenient with him. But do not think that because of this there will be any relenting. That is impossible. You can see Wayne

once more if you wish, but that is all. The rest of the family you must not see, and after this once, Wayne never again. He must be dead to you. Do you understand?"

Will made no reply. His soul was in that darkness and terror of temptation where God tries the souls of his children, to find whether they are wanting. It seemed to him that if Mr. Shirwyn said much more, he *must* yield and throw off the great load of disgrace and shame that had settled upon him. But Mr. Shirwyn had little more to say. He lingered over his letters and papers awhile, then turned around abruptly and said,

"I am going out for a little while. When I return you will be at liberty to look for a new situation, or to go anywhere you choose."

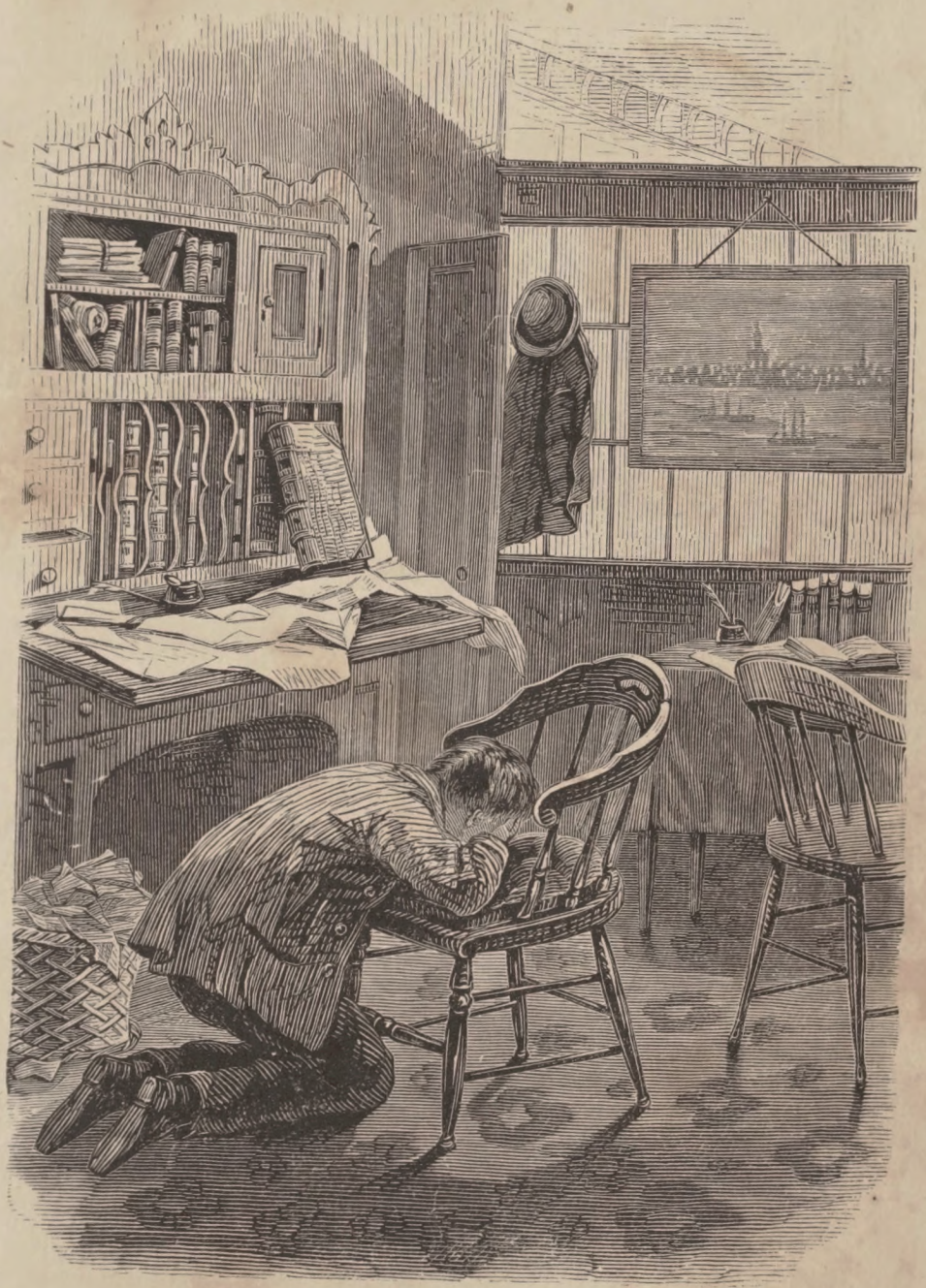
He turned the key behind him as he went out.

The Shirwyns were said to have noble blood in their veins, coming to them from some princely ancestor far back in the dead centuries; yet somehow, it seems to me, the old heroic blood had found its way into Will Rood's plebeian body, and showed itself forth with a princeliness for which the Shirwyns had no equal. Thrusting self aside, he had taken upon his shoulders the result of all Wayne's wrong-doing, to save Wayne and Wayne's friends.

Perhaps you will say that Will's friend was not worthy of this sacrifice, that it was wasted upon an undeserving object; but we were not put into the world to mete out to people their deserts. It was very easy to reveal the whole, expose Wayne, cause the whole of his evil-doing to be revealed far back to the period of its commencement, and place him — guilty, degraded, condemned — before his friends,

and thus save his own honor and reputation; it was another matter to let the whole blow fall upon himself and wait, through all the shame and disgrace, for Wayne to repent and confess his evil. Yet this he had chosen, and there the princeliness of one blood was not to be compared with the majesty of the other.

As the key turned in the lock, Will slid out of his chair on the floor, his face resting on its cushion. He did not cry nor sob,— there were no tears in his eyes. He did not pray,— the thoughts whirled too wildly in his heart. He only sat crushed and almost faint with pain. But soon enough he began to think what would be the consequences of his sacrifice! Oh, what ruin to his life! what disgrace! what a blight upon all his prospects! And the friends at home — father, mother and Mabel, for whom he had meant to do so much — what should he say



WILL UNDER SUSPICION. Page 130.

to them? What could he tell them? How could he go back to them with this great blot upon his good name?

And Mrs. Shirwyn, who called him her son with Wayne, who loved him and trusted in him, and Nina, with her bright, sisterly ways, would both look upon him as an ungrateful creature, who turned upon the friends that had cherished him. They would try to forget him as one whom they had trusted unworthily, and his name would be banished from the household. All these thoughts came to him as vividly as reality. And Wayne, faithless Wayne — ah, that was hardest of all to bear! It was his friend who had stabbed him,— his friend!

"O, Wayne! Wayne!" he groaned, "how could you? How could you?"

Mr. Shirwyn came back and with a sternness which he did not feel, said,

"You are now at liberty to go where you

choose. As no one will know of your delinquency, you will probably have little difficulty in obtaining another situation, though I should not advise you to do so as long as your present propensities remain unreformed. Good morning."

Mr. Shirwyn turned on his heel and went out. Will did not stir for some time. Where should he go? Who would take him in? But when his thoughts got calmer, he was not long in making a decision.

He would go home.

CHAPTER IX.

HOME.

MR. THADDEUS UPSON was busy lifting trunks and bales to the top of the stage-coach, and stooping to pick up a good-sized trunk, he took a look at its owner who was standing silently by.

"Hullo!" said he, with a whistle, "if this ain't you, Will Rood! Bless me! how you've growed since you went to the city. Sick? — goin' home to Thanksgivin', or what?"

A nervous, excited old lady, who had not yet recovered from her car-ride, here claimed Mr. Thaddeus's attention, and saved Will from the persecution of further enquiries, for which he was inexpressibly grateful.

He stood there in the dusk, in the midst of the noisy bustle of getting under way, with but a dim consciousness of what was transpiring around him. When for a moment eye and ear were opened, it was to notice how extraordinarily happy everybody seemed, and how boisterously loud and cheerful the country folk were talking. At that moment Mr. Thaddeus was bawling out in his big, raspy voice,

"Don' know 'bout that, Mis' Blodgett! You ain't no feather-weight now, I can tell ye, an' if you're agoin' to sit in the hind end I reckon there'll be an accident."

Upon this came the echo of women's voices, laughing and remonstrating, and then came the bustle of climbing into the stage, with such loud talking from farmers who had been down to town on business, and women who were going home from shopping expeditions, and with such overflowing good-

nature and merriness reigning over all, that Will wondered if the country people he left behind used to have such light hearts.

He too was going home like the others, but with disgrace and shame heaped upon him. What would Mr. Thaddeus say if he knew he had forged his employer's name? How all these rough, jolly country folk would shrink away from him if they knew the truth!

The stars were out all over the sky when the bundles and bales were stowed on the coach-top, and Mr. Thaddeus, with a last look all around, cried out,

"Come, Will, we're all aboard. S'pose you're goin' to ride up here with me, o' course. You were always the chap for havin' the outside seat, I remember."

"Thank you," said Will, dreading Mr. Thaddeus's inquisitiveness, "but I think I'll go inside this time."

Mr. Thaddeus speculated much over this when the coach was under way, and rolling along the turnpike where the friendly lights shone out of the farm-house windows.

"Been a-gettin' too smart to ride outside," he soliloquized. "Never knew a boy that went to the city but what was spoilt for one thing or another. 'Fraid it's damp and he'll hurt his throat, mos' likely. I swunny! I didn't think Will Rood would come to that. Who–a–a–ay! 'Pears to me it's rather early to be goin' home to Thanksgiving — Stea–a–ady there! — Hope the youngster hain't been gettin' into any scrape."

But somebody, quite unconscious of Mr. Thaddeus's conjectures, sat crowded next to the coach-door, his head resting against the glass, and his eye taking in the whole dim, vast, shadowy panorama that swept by. Through all the anguish of thus returning to his friends, there struggled a gladness

that he was going home. He could not believe that father and mother would cast him off. They would trust in him, they would give him the comfort of their love and sympathy. And then the country was friendly. There was room to breathe; it was great-hearted.

The very meadows stretching away through the dimness, the old orchards with their fragrant, dropping fruit, the lowing cows at the yard-bars, seemed to welcome him. Looking and listening to all they passed in the dusky, star-lit evening, his heart felt stronger and lighter. The wafts of crisp, fresh night-air that blew in when the door was opened, revived him.

Still smarting under Mr. Shirwyn's sternness, he listened to the rough, hearty, friendly voices that were making the place a Babel, with something akin to pleasure. Oh, it was good to flee away from the cold, heartless, unfeeling city!

So the coach climbed up hills and rumbled down, the stars shone in brighter upon him, the golden glow over the woods in the west faded into pure, lucent, palest amber, the jangle of talk dwindled away to a one-sided conversation between "Mis' Blodgett" and a drover on the back seat, respecting "Sary Ann's baby," and even this ceased when the coach drew up before a farm-gate and Mr. Thaddeus, opening the door, announced that "Mis' Blodgett was to hum."

Then came the delay of looking up the baggage, — Mr. Thaddeus's lantern flaring great circles of light over the leaf-strewn ground, the wide farm-gate, the stout, corpulent woman who got out, and some curly-headed children who had come down to look on, till at last matters were righted, the door slammed, the whip cracked and off they rolled.

Things grew familiar at last; he caught a glimpse of the bar-way, a mile from home,

where he had been so many times after the cows; the old butternut tree, which the lightning had shivered, extended a bleached, shrivelled arm to him through the dusk; a solitary star gleamed up from the glassy little brook where he had so often waded, and everything hinted of home and friends. But now, so near his journey's end, his heart was divided between joy and anxiety. How should he meet them? What should he say to them?

He pressed his face against the glass to catch the first glimpse of light from the home-windows. Yes, there it shone,—just as bright as ever, just as he had seen it hundreds of times before. The coach stopped and he sprang out. Mr. Thaddeus brought down the trunk without much delay, set it within the gate, took his fare, and with a rather gruff good night, rumbled on into

the darkness. Will paused, leaning against the gate. This was home!

Old Mrs. Rood was getting a late supper that night, the farmer having been down to Newland on business and just returned. Her back was toward the door as she bent over the stove, so that she did not perceive it to swing slightly ajar a few minutes after the coach passed. The farmer, with chores all done and waiting for his supper, was deep in the contents of the weekly paper, over which he was poring by the dim light of a candle, hung on the black mantel just above his head. They did not know how some one, with tears in his eyes, was watching the picture they made, through the crack of the door. If the mother thought of her boy, it was as in the far-away city in the bright, elegant, pleasant home which he had written so much about. Mabel, Will could

see, was sitting in her little chair, looking gravely on at the getting of supper and at her father's face.

Pretty soon good Mrs. Rood, said, "Mabel, did you leave that door open when you came in a little while ago? Seems to me there's a great rush of air 'round my feet."

"Well," said the farmer, who was in his shirt-sleeves, "I was thinking of that myself, wife. I don't know but the old house is getting leaky."

Mabel's eyes had turned toward the door at her mother's first words. Perceiving that it *was* slightly ajar, she got up from her chair and took two or three steps in its direction, then stopped with a little shiver of alarm — fancying the door trembled as if there was some one behind it. The door came suddenly open and with a great cry of "Will! Will!" Mabel was holding her brother with both arms and nestling her head down in his neck.

Old Mr. Rood dropped his newspaper and stared through his spectacles in utter bewilderment, for a few seconds, before he recognized this unannounced visitor. Mrs. Rood, with both hands full of coffee-pot and a plate of meat and potatoes, stood midway between the table and stove, so bewildered by this sudden apparition of her son, that she was unable to set down her burdens or find her tongue.

"Bless my old eyes! is this really you, Will?" said the farmer, taking off his spectacles and hurrying across the floor; "Mabel, child, don't hug Will so,— I want a chance at him myself. My son!"

How full of joy they were at seeing him!

"Mamma, mamma," shouted Mabel, "it's Will! Don't you know?"

"My great tall boy!" said the mother, fondly, putting her hands on his shoulder and kissing him. "How can I believe my

eyes? Do look, father, and see how he's grown!"

How proud they were of him! This gladness, so evident in everything they said and did, lightened Will's heavy heart somewhat. But how would they feel when they knew all? Oh, how could he ever tell them? How could he endure to throw a shadow over all their rejoicing? Yet it must be done.

"There, mother, the supper's getting cold," said the farmer, rather more averse to showing his pride and delight; "I guess Will's hungry enough by this time. Rode since morning, haven't ye?"

"Since the middle of the forenoon," said Will; "but I'm not very hungry."

Though the mother was hardly able to take her eyes off her son, she started at this suggestion. Will had come home and was hungry. This was joy enough for

once. Nothing could be too good for their tall, manly, noble boy; the best of the house must come forth.

While mother Rood bustled between the buttery and table, Mabel climbed to her old place in her brother's lap, and the old farmer, forgetting all about his paper, looked on with a delighted face, and a consciousness that this boy of his was wonderfully unlike the deacon's Zebulon, or Uncle Nat Frisbie's Sam. Looking at him, the farmer could not quite contain himself after all, and shuffled into the buttery to whisper to mother Rood,

"I declare, wife, does it seem as if that could be our boy? I never see such a change afore in anybody. I wonder if young Shirwyn looks any smarter or nobler?"

"There, father," said Mrs. Rood, her face catching a glow from the golden honey

over which she was bending, "don't talk to me about being foolish. Better wait and see whether the handsomeness is all on the outside or not."

Just as if her own heart was not all the while swelling with the same thoughts which he had given utterance to!

"Well," said she, as they came out of the buttery, "I believe supper is ready. Come Will and Mabel."

They sat down at the table. After the blessing, conversation went on steadily, the love and joy of father and mother showing forth in every word, look and action. Will trembled, seeing how they loved him and how much he was to their lives. He had tried to deserve it, he had worked hard to be worthy of their love; but now he had come home to shock them with truth which must be told.

"Seems to me you don't eat very much,"

said mother Rood, with a shade of anxiety on her face; "I'm afraid city-living hasn't been good for your appetite. You used to like biscuits and honey. Now I think of it, I said to Mabel this afternoon, while I was making them, 'How Will used to like biscuits and butter and honey!' And here you are to help us eat them! Father, do help him to some more honey."

"Perhaps," said the farmer, with a side look at his son, "it's our plain spread that troubles him. He's been used to silver and china and cut-glass, with all sorts of dainty things to put in them, you know, wife."

"Father doesn't mean that," said Will; "I'll show you how I can eat in a day or two!" Meanwhile, he allowed them to heap his plate, and ate for their pleasure rather than his own.

In their happiness they had not thought to ask him why he came home thus sudden-

ly. That he had come home was happiness enough for the present. But mother Rood presently asked,

"Why didn't Wayne come with you? He has been agoing to visit us for a great while."

For a second or two Will hesitated; then he said, "I will tell you about it after supper, mother."

The father drifted off into talk about the farm, while mother filled all the gaps with questions about the Shirwyns — unconsciously cutting Will to the heart at every word — and Mabel forgot her bread and butter in looking at her brother.

CHAPTER X.

TELLING HIS STORY.

AFTER supper was over and the dishes were washed, and everything seemed to be quietly settled for the evening, Will felt that the time had come to tell his story, and reveal why he had thus suddenly returned. Fortunately the way was opened for this by mother Rood saying, as she took up her knitting,

"Well, I'm right glad you came so soon, Will. Father was going to write down for you to come up to Thanksgiving, anyway; but now you've saved him that trouble, and we'll have all the more time to visit with you."

"Yes," said the farmer, "it's no small trouble you've saved me. I'd rather do a whole day's chopping than write a letter. Now, Mabel, perhaps Will is too tired to have you climb up in his lap like that."

But Will held his sister in her old place, and nerved himself to begin his story. How he shrank from it, seeing what a gloom it would cast over their happiness, you may imagine. He began with,

"I don't know but I should have put father to the trouble of writing a letter, after all, if something had not occurred to send me home so soon. I have something to tell you, and I want you to be patient with me till I am through, and prepare yourselves for the worst."

The old people were looking at him with wonder in their eyes, but with no suspicion that their son could return to them with anything but honor attaching to him.

"I came home," said Will, making a great effort, "because I have got through at Mr. Shirwyn's. I am not to go back there any more. There has been trouble and it has come upon me."

He paused, almost choking, for they were looking at him with such bewilderment, utterly unable to comprehend that he was in disgrace.

"Why," said mother Rood, at last, "what kind of trouble? Is anybody dead?"

"No," said Will, "not that. I am in disgrace. There has been a note forged in Mr. Shirwyn's office and the crime is laid to me." He meant to have broken the intelligence to them less abruptly, but somehow the whole bitter truth had come out at once. For a moment he covered his eyes, not daring to look up, then, remembering all that he had yet to say, he exclaimed, "Don't judge me yet, father, mother. I have so

much to tell you! — and I cannot tell you all that I want to either. I am as innocent of meaning to wrong Mr. Shirwyn, or of touching a penny that was not my own, as Mabel here." Mother Rood drew a great sigh of relief, and the shocked, startled look that had been on the farmer's face faded away. "But," continued Will, "everything looks as if I had committed the crime. Mr. Shirwyn believes me guilty, and I did copy his signature. I acknowledge that."

"Copied his signature?" repeated the farmer slowly and with a troubled face. "Forged it, you mean?"

"Yes, father," said Will, "I forged his signature, and that is what troubles me to explain to you. I can't tell all to you now, but it was done carelessly, without any thought of the consequences. I did it for a friend, to show him what I could do. Then it was used to draw a large amount of

money, and the guilt and blame all came upon me."

"And you could not prove it otherwise?" said the farmer.

Will was silent for a few seconds, then he said, "Yes, I could have proved it otherwise."

"Why, Willie!" exclaimed mother Rood; "and you did not clear yourself?"

"No; that is what troubles me. I want to tell you everything, but I cannot, now. I must keep back something, and ask you to trust me."

The farmer's face was getting anxious and troubled again. He liked straightforwardness above all things.

"It seems to me," he began, slowly rubbing his hands together, "that if you could prove your innocence easily, it would be best to do so — for your own sake, for all our sakes. A man can't have too clear a reputation in these days."

Will colored, and was silent.

"Perhaps Will hasn't told us everything yet, father," said Mrs. Rood, trying to smother her anxiety; "you know he wanted us to wait, and be patient till he was through."

"I am patient," said the farmer. "I only want to know the truth. You know who drew this money, Will?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you could prove this person's guilt?"

"Yes, sir."

There was a silence more significant than words. Mrs. Rood looked at her son, beseeching him, with her eyes, to say more.

"Perhaps I can't make it clear to you, father, why I thought it right to let the blame all come upon me," said Will, "but I'll try. I was afraid that if I brought such sudden ruin upon him, and exposed him

before all his friends, that it would only harden him, and do no good at all — except to clear my own name. But if I wait patiently, I think — I am pretty sure — that he will repent and confess all, and take all the disgrace off my name, and become the noble fellow he ought to be. Do I make it clear to you, father?"

The quick tears stood in the old man's eyes. This boy of his was made of strange metal, — something rarer than the common mould, he thought. He was not sure that he was up to his level; this strange proceeding touched him, but he was not quite certain that he appreciated all the beauty of such conduct. He looked up when the tears were dried in his eyes, saying,

"And the name of this person who has wronged you, my son?"

At this point, Mabel, who had gradually been slipping out of her brother's lap, under

the impression that some evil had been or was going to be committed, ran to her mother. Will went over to his father's chair, and said firmly,

"I can't tell you anything more now, father. Perhaps never, — I don't know, — but I am innocent, and I have never taken a penny that is not my own" — here his voice faltered a little — "and if I could only know that you and mother trusted in me, it seems to me that I wouldn't mind or care what the others thought, — at least, not much."

There was a hush in the little kitchen. Mrs. Rood's needles stopped their clicking. At last the farmer cleared his throat and took Will's hand in his own. How could he distrust his first-born? — this brave, honest-eyed boy of his who was not afraid to look him in the face — who did not shrink under his gaze — who told his story so unfalteringly. Was this guilt?

"God knows I don't mistrust ye, Will — not in the least," said he, in his hearty old voice, "and as for your mother — "

"Now, father," said Mrs. Rood, deprecatingly, "Will knows I don't distrust him." She got up, wiping her eyes with the corner of her gingham apron, and came around to their side of the stove; and there the three stood, the love and confidence between them unshaken.

A great load lifted from Will's heart. When he was back in his chair, and Mabel had returned to him — nestling her head down on his breast in happy consciousness that the little cloud of trouble had blown over — he was so joyful and happy that it was quite useless to think of talking for a little while. Father and mother believed in him still; there was some one left to love him and trust in him.

But after a while, father Rood began to grow impatient to know more of the affair.

"Seems to me," said he, with a trifle of indignation in his voice, "that Shirwyn has been plaguy hasty 'bout this business! He might have took your word and waited a little bit. 'Twouldn't have hurt him, and it might save you a deal of trouble. I don't like that in Shirwyn."

But Will made haste to say, "I've reason to be very thankful to Mr. Shirwyn. He thinks me guilty and I don't blame him, for it all looks as if I had wronged him. And he forgave me the loss of the money which he supposed I had taken, and said that it should all be a secret outside of his own family. That's a great deal, father."

"And what *did* Wayne say?" said mother Rood, remembering what a warm, impulsive heart young Shirwyn had.

"He — I — I did not see Wayne before I came away," said Will; "he was gone to recitations."

"Well, I suppose that suited you best," said Mrs. Rood, with something like a sigh; "but it would seem strange to me to see you dread to meet him,— you were always such friends."

"I did not dread to meet him," said Will; "he would have known that I was innocent. I shall never fear that Wayne will think me guilty."

The Roods little dreamed what truth was in this remark.

"And the rest of the Shirwyns?"

"I saw none of them," said Will, "excepting the little girl about Mabel's age. The others were out for the forenoon. I did not want to see them. Perhaps I had no right to, since Mr. Shirwyn forbade me to be anything but a stranger to his family."

"Did he do that?" said the farmer, hastily.

"Yes, sir. You forget that I am just the

same as a criminal in his eyes, father,— a creature with whom he wishes none of his family to come in contact."

A shadow came over his face. What were they doing in the bright, pleasant home from which he had been banished, at this moment? Were they all thinking of him with aversion and horror? Would they miss or regret his absence? He wished he knew.

"Well," said the farmer, after a long silence, "there's room enough in the world for us all. The country is broad and free for every one, when the city crowds 'em out. I don't fear for you anywhere, my son,— not a bit."

"And it seems so good to have him home before Thanksgiving," said mother Rood, brightly; "I shall take twice as much comfort now, making preparations. And it does us all good to look at your face, Will. We

want you at home with us; you've worked too hard this summer. Now you can have a rest."

"Yes," said Will, with more hopefulness in his face than there had been in it since his return. "I can rest till this person I have mentioned repents and does me justice. Then my name will be clear again!"

"But if that time never comes, my son?" said the farmer.

"It will come!" said Will, confidently; "it may be a good while first, but it will certainly come at last."

Both husband and wife took heart at his confidence, and at this point the old clock in the kitchen corner struck nine. Mother Rood rolled up her knitting.

"We keep the old hours, you see, Will," she said, with a smile; "and I guess you've been through enough to-day to be glad to go to bed at nine o'clock too. I declare!

if Mabel isn't fast asleep in your arms. Wake up here, Mab! — it's trundle-bed time. You don't know how the child pined for you the first few weeks after you left us. I suspect we all did, as for that matter. Your trunk? Father will help you up with that. Good night, my son," kissing him fervently, " wake up in the morning to begin your vacation. It will be a holyday to all of us."

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE RICH MAN'S HOUSE.

AS Will saw none of the Shirwyns', after his talk with Mr. Shirwyn at the office, the family remained in ignorance of what had occurred through the day. Mr. Shirwyn came home at night as usual, looking rather grave and weary, and alone. He met the bright, smiling faces that greeted him with no smile upon his own.

"Pa is worried about business to-night, I know," said Nina, as she received the kiss he always gave her upon returning home; "let's have tea at once. It is all ready, and we'll sit down now. Come, Wayne!"

They sat down at the pleasant tea-table,

Mrs. Shirwyn enquiring why Will's work kept him so much later than usual. Mr. Shirwyn made no reply until after he had asked the blessing, and the tea had been poured; then, nerving himself to perform the disagreeable task, he said, in answer to his wife's question,

"My dear, I've some very sad news for you all. I expect it will shock you as it did myself. Will has deceived us."

A breathless silence followed, every eye at the table turned upon him, and every face anxiously waiting for explanation. It was something very unusual for Mr. Shirwyn to falter, as he did, in beginning his disclosure. Sorrow and reluctance shadowed his face.

"In saying that Will has deceived us," he continued, "I mean that he has proved unworthy of the love and confidence we gave him, that he is not the upright, pure-hearted

boy we thought him. I made the discovery this morning, or rather Barstow did, that quite a large amount had been drawn upon a forged check. Will has confessed the forgery and left for home this forenoon."

In spite of her usual self-command, the tea-cup which Mrs. Shirwyn had raised half-way to her lips, fell from her hand and shivered in pieces on her plate. Nina leaned back in her chair, pale and sick; but attention was all directed to Wayne, who, in half-rising from his chair, fell backward and dropped heavily on the floor, where he lay white and still.

"Wayne has fainted!" screamed Nina. "O father, don't say this dreadful news is true! What shall I do, mamma?"

"Ring for Blecker," said Mrs. Shirwyn, as she bent over her son. "Arthur," to her husband, "help me undo his collar and neck-tie. It's only a faint, but Wayne is not strong or well lately."

Mr. Shirwyn had expected some demonstration on the part of Wayne, and was not greatly surprised, only very sorrowful. As he bent with his wife over their unconscious son, she looked up with eyes full of tears and said, entreatingly,

"Tell me that this is not true, Arthur!—that there is some hope of his being innocent."

"It is all too true," he sadly answered.

Mrs. Shirwyn's tears fell upon Wayne's face.

Blecker came in, pausing a minute in the doorway with astonishment at the strange sight before him, then Wayne was laid upon the sofa, where he soon revived and opened his eyes. At first he looked up with wonder and bewilderment in his eyes, then, as the remembrance of what had occurred flashed upon him, he covered his face from sight and groaned.

"O, I wish I could die!" he gasped out.

Though Wayne was always impulsive and apt to give expression to his strong emotions, Mr. Shirwyn seemed to think this going too far.

"Your friend is unworthy of such sorrow, Wayne," he said. "I want you to be strong and forget him as something unworthy of your friendship."

"Oh, father," said Nina, entreatingly, "don't say that—just yet. See how Wayne suffers! Poor Wayne!" she added, pityingly, pulling his hands away from his face, stroking his hair back and kissing his forehead. "Perhaps it will all come right after all, and then Will will come back to us. I don't believe he can be guilty, do you, Wayne? There's some mistake, and by and by it will be righted, and then we shall all be happy again. But now!—"

Here Nina burst into tears, and laying her

face beside Wayne's, sobbed as if her heart was breaking. How many of the tears were shed for Will, and how many for Wayne, it would not be easy to tell.

Husband and wife looked on, one with a sad face, the other with tearful eyes. And here Mother Bunch, who, all the time, had been strangely silent, under the impression that something terrible had befallen Will, and was going to befall the rest, came forward to relate how Will kissed her with tears in his eyes that morning, when he went away "with the big trunk." Then she began to howl dolorously.

"Oh," exclaimed Nina, "I don't believe he could do such thing, do you, Wayne? Wayne! why don't you say you think he is innocent?—why don't you say that you *know* he is innocent?"

Wayne's face contracted with such a spasm of pain, that Nina was shocked and frightened.

"Forgive me," she said, tenderly; "I forget how much more he was to you than the rest of us. But oh, Wayne, we will never doubt him, will we? We'll trust in him till it all comes right again."

"Nina, my dear child," said Mr. Shirwyn, sorrowfully, "your confidence in his innocence will all be in vain. You forget that he confessed his guilt."

But Nina did not seem to renounce him then.

As Mother Bunch's lamentations did not cease, Mrs. Shirwyn led her away to the nursery, and the room settled down to something like quietness. The tea-table, glittering with its silver and crystal, stood deserted. No one had any more heart for supper. Mr. Shirwyn took up some letters and papers which Blecker had brought in, examining them with a sad face, and uneasy, restless manner. Nina sat on the sofa trying

to comfort Wayne, who seemed to be hardly out of his swoon.

Mrs. Shirwyn, on her return from the nursery, took up a book and made an attempt at reading, but the book was soon laid down, and her chair wheeled around by Wayne and Nina. There was no use in trying to disguise the truth. This blow fell heavily. It was almost like having the disgrace and shame come upon Wayne.

Thus they sat for nearly an hour, till Mr. Shirwyn, pushing away letters and papers, joined their circle.

"I did not know," he said, sadly, "how dear Will had become to us. I see, now, how much we shall miss him. It is like losing a son."

"It does not seem possible," Mrs. Shirwyn said, "that such a noble, upright, pure-hearted boy, as I knew Will to be, could thus fall. I do not see what could have tempted

him. He spent all his evenings at home, he never went away, except with us, and what could he want of money?"

Mr. Shirwyn had not thought of that.

"It is all very mysterious," he said, with a shake of his head; "his conduct puzzled me when I confronted him with the check. I never saw innocence so well counterfeited, and he denied having taken a penny of my money to the last."

"Did he do that?" said Mrs. Shirwyn, earnestly; "oh, I should have been tempted to believe him, Arthur. It seems to me I would have trusted him a little longer,—long enough to have seen what came of this."

"You forget, my dear," said her husband, "that he confessed the forgery; then, before I let him go, I went to the bank where the check was cashed, and the teller was ready to swear that either my son or Will drew

the amount. It must have been Will of course. So, though I long to do so, I cannot possibly see how we can look upon him as anything but guilty."

Wayne shivered and groaned. Mr. Shirwyn looked sympathizingly at his son's white face, and moved close to the sofa, intent upon consoling him.

"My dear boy," he said, comfortingly, "I want you to bear up and be strong. If this friend of yours could prove himself so ungrateful, he is not worth sorrowing so about. Think of what you have left, and keep up a light heart. I don't blame you for being shocked,— it is a great blow for us all— a great blow."

He took Wayne's cold hands in his, and pressed them gently.

There are times when to have kindness heaped upon one is to suffer the most exquisite torture. This Wayne Shirwyn had

to endure. Guilty, shivering with remorse and dread, at one moment love for Will almost forcing confession from his lips, while his fierce pride crushed it down the next, he lay there, an example of the perfect, abject slavery to which evil reduces its victims.

"I know," continued the father, utterly unconscious of the anguish he was causing his son, "that everything conspired to make Will dearer than a brother to you; but you are young and will soon recover from this. And think of what hosts of friends, young and old, you have left to you. My son, pray cheer up and be stronger than this."

"Come, dear Wayne, open your eyes and be brighter," said Nina; "we're going to look on a brighter side than father does, and it won't do to be cast down. Come, Wayne, look cheerful once more!"

She put her face down to his, entreatingly.

Wayne felt as if he should suffocate. A great pain throbbed through his temples, and a keener pain tortured his heart. He was utterly wretched. Not yet recovered from the faintness which the shock of the news had produced, he felt, some of the time, as if his life was slowly slipping away from him, and for a moment would be glad; then, remembering that if he died Will's character would never be cleared, he would rouse himself up, and gasp for breath and long for life. Yet no confession of the truth escaped him. He wanted to wait a little longer — perhaps till morning. Evil held him securely in its snare.

But in all this the Shirwyns caught no inkling of the truth. They witnessed Wayne's distress with sadness, and were somewhat puzzled at some of the phases of his grief; but as Wayne had been more or less a puzzle to them for a long time, they thought little of it.

Mr. Shirwyn continued to talk kindly and cheerfully, Mrs. Shirwyn was sympathizing and attentive, and Nina the model of a comforting sister, till at last Wayne could bear it no longer. He roused up with a haggard, despairing face.

"Don't say any more to me," he begged; "I'm faint — ill! — I can't bear it. I would like to go to bed."

Blecker was called.

"No, let me go alone," said Wayne; "I want to be alone."

"But you are weak and faint," said his mother, anxiously; "see, you can hardly walk straight. Blecker, you may help him up stairs. Wayne, I insist upon it!"

So Wayne was obliged to yield, and was half-carried up stairs by the faithful old servant, who, unbeknown to his young master, slept in the hall just beside his door that night.

As the door closed behind the two, Mr.

Shirwyn turned to his wife with an almost despairing face.

"I don't know what is to become of Wayne," he said in a troubled voice; "some of his actions are very mysterious. He seems to have no control over his feelings, nor can he bear any shock or surprise. We have lost our merry, light-hearted boy."

"He has not been very well all Summer," said Mrs. Shirwyn, "and this shock seems to have completely unnerved him. But he will be better in the morning, I hope."

"Yes, but I want him *well*. The Storers are going to Havana next week, for the Winter. Hugh is going too, and would be company for Wayne. I think change of scene and climate will do him good, and if you think best, my dear, I will engage a passage for him at once."

"It may be best," said Mrs. Shirwyn, thoughtfully, "but I would rather consult

Wayne first. I will see him about it in the morning."

Here Nina came up to kiss her mother good-night. When she went to her father she put her arms about his neck, and after she had kissed him, whispered,

"Would you let Will come back if you thought he was repentant — if he seemed to be changed, and bound to commit no more — more evil?"

"My girl has a kind heart," said the father, fondly, "but," — after a pause — "I must employ only those whom I can trust."

Nina went away with a sad face.

CHAPTER XII.

THOUGHTS IN THE NIGHT-TIME.

WAYNE, parting from Blecker at the door, entered his room with slow, heavy steps, and threw himself as usual upon the sofa. Here he might groan without being heard; here he might have his misery all to himself. But he did not rest long. A little fire flickered and gleamed in the grate to keep out the chill of the Autumn nights, and its light flashed at times over the floor. Wayne lay — faint and sick with wretchedness — and watched it, and by and by caught the gleam of something on the carpet within the circle of the pale fire-light. He cared little about it in the extremity of

his anguish, but lay and sometimes watched it flash and sparkle when he opened his eyes between his throbs of pain.

When the pillow had grown hot to his face, and he could no longer endure his present position, he wearily rose, and as he passed across the floor, stooped and picked up the glittering thing that lay there. It proved to be a little golden trinket which he had given Will. It had evidently been dropped in the hurry of departure. Looking at it was sufficient to set all Wayne's thoughts whirling anew. There were other signs of Will's hurried departure,— an old letter or two dropped upon the carpet, an open drawer with but half of its contents taken out, some books lying in a chair, left behind through haste or for want of room. And there, in its accustomed place, hung the silken lounging cap which Nina had netted for him with her own hands.

Wayne looked at all these things and at the empty bed, and shuddered. The room was lonely and desolate. Before, when oppressed by his troubled heart, he had found some comfort in looking at Will's unclouded, cheerful face. Now he was all alone,—alone with his sin and guilt and misery.

And at this time, far over hill and valley, some one in trouble came into his room also. It was a little room, plain and unfinished, under the eaves of the low, old farm-house. There were no paintings and marbles to adorn it, no glowing grate, no soft, rich carpet, nothing luxurious. An uncurtained window let in the faint light from the sky and stars. But Will Rood, thinking of nothing but the words with which father and mother had made him happy, came into it and sat down by the uncurtained window, and was so rich at that moment, that he missed nothing of the richness to which he

was accustomed. This was home. The old people below trusted in him. These, for the present, were riches enough.

Sitting by the window he looked up to the great company of stars, and, looking at the stars, his thoughts went down to the city and Wayne — Wayne, who had wronged him.

With his heart so warm and glad, it was an easier matter to think of Wayne's faithlessness, than it had been while riding home in the stage-coach, in an agony of uncertainty and doubt. He could look the whole matter over calmly now, and see how Wayne, driven to desperation, and too proud to bear the punishment which results from transgression, had seized upon the forged check as a means to rid himself of (so Will thought) the villianous-looking man, who held such mysterious power over him.

Perhaps Wayne did not mean to wrong

him, he thought. Perhaps he used the check; and hoped and expected its spuriousness would never be detected. Perhaps he intended, in case such an event occurred, to step forward and confess his guilt; he might even now have done so, Will thought, with a thrill at his heart.

But could he forgive Wayne? If this faithless friend held his peace and never acknowledged his sin,— if he allowed the shadow of guilt, with all its blighting consequences, to rest where it had fallen, could he forgive him then? Oh, that was a hard question!

But when, after a little longer gazing at the peaceful stars, he knelt down to say his prayers, Wayne was remembered as of old, and with a heart too full of love and yearning to hold the hate and malice of an unforgiving spirit.

And the stars, looking in at another win-

dow, where the filmy lace had been pulled away, saw a far different picture. Here, as at the other window, a face looked out into the night, but a face in which there was no hope and only despair. Wayne, feeling that the darkness would bring no sleep for him, had pulled the sofa across the deep window. and thrown himself there, where he could look out on the night and up at the stars.

The stars never seem to have anything in common with a guilty heart, and Wayne found little pleasure in looking at them. He preferred the blank of darkness that hung over roof and street. Yet even in the street the lamps winked and blinked like solitary eyes peering at him.

As the shock and pain of his father's disclosure gradually wore off, his remorse and anguish grew keener. Wayne was not hardened in sin. Though his pride and weakness had led him a long and devious

way, till at last he had fallen, his perceptions of everything pure, noble and generous, remained clear as ever. Neither had his warm and naturally noble impulses vanished, and now, thinking of Will Rood's heroic generosity, he appreciated it to the utmost. And thinking, he groaned and tossed uneasily, and could find no ray of hope or comfort anywhere.

This friend of his had deliberately taken upon his shoulders the guilt and shame of an evil deed, to shelter such a poor, weak, worthless creature as himself. Why had he done this? Wayne's heart told him why.

"Oh," he groaned, in an agony of remorse and grief, "I was not worth such a sacrifice, — not worth shielding a moment. I wish he had never, never done it! I wish it had all come upon me at once and crushed me instead of him. I could have borne that better than this."

Any other trouble seems easier to be borne than the one under which we are suffering. Wayne Shirwyn, suddenly disgraced in the eyes of his friends, and forced by another to reveal his deception, would have been a reckless, desperate soul; Wayne Shirwyn, left to repent and make his own confession, there was some hope for.

But now there was only suffering and despair for his portion. Some of the time he lay faint and sick with anguish, at the thought of this trouble which he had brought upon his too faithful friend. In spite of his knowledge of Will's greatness of heart, it seemed to him that, for such a wrong as he had wrought, there could be no forgiveness. Such heroism and generosity on one side, such weakness and selfishness on the other! Oh, it was no use to hope for forgiveness. But he had done nothing to deserve forgiveness. He knew

that, and he was so weak and proud, and there was such small hope that he could ever get the strength and courage to make a confession and put the guilt where it belonged, that he cowered and shrank down among his pillows and hopelessly groaned.

The late-rising moon, pushing up from behind the hill and over the wood tops, shone in at the uncurtained window and found Will, though abed, still awake. The many events of the day had somehow driven sleep away, and assured of the love and confidence of those who cared for him at home, his thoughts went back to the city and of course to the Shirwyns. He longed very much to know whether they had all cast him out of their hearts, as Mr. Shirwyn had cast him from his home, or whether Wayne had come forward and taken the consequences of his own guilt. He wondered if Mrs. Shirwyn and Nina would readily judge

him guilty, or whether they would cling to a hope of his innocence. And Wayne — guilty Wayne — how would he receive the news? How would he bear himself before them all? What was he thinking of at this moment, all alone in his room, with the moon shining in? Oh, if he might only look in, as the moon looked in, and know all.

But, whether Wayne ever laid bare the truth or not, he had made up his mind concerning Wayne. He would forgive him and never do aught to ruin his good name; he would find work again, and win for himself friends and a good name, for, as father said, there was room enough in the world for everybody. Then, though he never saw Wayne again nor heard aught from him, he would still have the happy consciousness of knowing that he had never given him other than a helping hand. And such a message he would have been glad to sent to him on

the fleecy clouds that were drifting over the hills, cityward.

The moon, climbing over the roofs, shone in at Wayne Shirwyn's window and found him still awake,— too wretched to sleep, too remorseful to find any rest. The night was long — frightfully long — yet he dreaded the dawn. He felt that with the coming of daylight over the roofs and spires, his decision must be made: either the guilt must rest forever where it had fallen, or he must confess all. Now, as he felt this, a desire to do right struggled in Wayne's heart. He was not so selfish but that he desired to show Will's honor bright before every one, but this seemed an utter impossibility because of his pride and weakness. To save Will he must ruin (as he thought) himself. How could he ever do this? Oh, for a tithe of his friend's strength and generosity that did not waver — did not flinch under a harder trial than his own!

He wept hot, bitter tears in the pillow over his own weakness.

But to persons who, like Wayne Shirwyn, have been gradually drawn into the slavery of sin and deception, there comes a time when either they throw off the chains of their bondage, or allow them to be newly riveted for bondage perpetual. This time had come to Wayne, and though so weak and fearfully tempted to yield, he clung resolutely to his faint hope that by and by he should get courage enough to do his duty.

The moon rose higher and shone down full upon him, and lighted the room well. His sleepless eyes noted everything that hinted of Will.

How many times he had seen him with that silken cap, which hung over the sea-painting, upon his head. And the books in the chair, the letters on the floor, the empty bed! — ah, it only made his temples throb

harder to look. He would turn over and try to sleep. The effort to sleep lasted nearly a minute; then he was suffering as keenly as ever. What, sacrifice his friend,— the friend who nearly lost his life for him, who had always given up his own comfort for his ease, who had been everything that one friend could be to another,— to make his own honor look bright? No! no! — he would never do that! Then came another question. What, sacrifice his pride, degrade himself to the level of thieves and robbers, destroy the happiness of father, mother and sister, and be forever lowered in their eyes, for the sake of one who had voluntarily assumed the guilt of the deed and who would probably never reveal the real truth? Oh, no! he could never do that!

Thus he was torn between desire to do right and the gratification of his own selfishness. The moon climbed up so that it no

longer shone in at the window, and the room began to grow dim again. Wayne lay and watched the east whitening over the house-tops, with much the same feeling that the doomed criminal sees the dawning of the day of death. But he lay still now, fairly worn and wearied into quietness. A sharp pain shot through and through his temples, and he grew hot and feverish. Still the question was not decided, and would not be still. It kept ringing in his weary brain,— "Choose between yourself and Will— *Choose!— Choose!*" Yes, it was time to choose, he knew. He lay white and motionless for half an hour, and in that time of silence came the struggle—a fiercer struggle than ever Wayne knew again; and then, with a groan at the pain it cost him, he sobbed out—just as the white light of dawn was looking in—"O Will! Will!— I will tell all."

CHAPTER XIII.

LOOKING FOR A LETTER.

DAYS at the farm went by somewhat slowly at first. Will was looking for a letter that did not come. But after the first excitement over the event which sent him home in disgrace was past, he took up the old home life with a keen zest for all its hearty pleasures and comforts. There was no end to the joy which the woods and meadows and hills held for him.

The crops were coming home day after day, and the Thanksgiving feast was not a great way off. The apples had been picked, but on the orchard grass their gold and red and brown shone out, and they scented the

air in the cool, dewy Autumn evenings. The hills looked warm and sunny in their mellow-hued garbs. The very old lichen-grown stone walls and fences, grown full of golden-rod, blackberry vines and elder bushes, were a delight. There were great heaps of cider apples in the lots, waiting to go to mill, oxen plodding home with high-heaped carts of potatoes and turnips, men and boys at work in the sunshiny fields, and joy and peace and comfort everywhere. Neither was there a hearty word of welcome home wanting.

When country people are glad to see one, they are not generally backward about disclosing their pleasure. So, when it was known that Will had returned, Uncle Sam Hull, or Mr. Seth Barnes, or Amasa Roper, or any of the score of complacent old farmers who lived in brother Rood's neighborhood, found it convenient to call for a drink

of water when passing, and thus have a look at, and a talk with, this boy which the country had given to the city.

"Wanted to see if brother Rood hadn't missed it, sendin' his boy off so. But I declare, sister Rood" — taking a critical survey of the subject of conversation — "I don' know but you was 'bout right after all. Haint got above yer old neighbors, hev ye, Will? Now they say you're just about the smartest penman in town. S'pose ye can beat Parson Hubbard?"

Will, who remembered the old minister's crabbed, unreadable handwriting, gave his mother a look out of the corners of his eyes, but did not put forward any claim to superiority.

"Well, it's a good thing to be able to get a livin' easy. Land knows I don't grudge it to ye. Comin' down to see our folks afore ye go back? My wife's got some punkin

pies in the works, an' you'd better happen 'round some o' these days. That Shir — Shir — Shir something fellow that came up from the city with ye that Summer, said her punkin pies was prime. He'd ought to know, I reckon. Wall, this won't pick up my potatoes. How's your man's potatoes turn out, sister Rood? Good? So do mine — tolerable; been a good year for potatoes. Good mornin' — come down an' see us when ye can, Will."

When a week had elapsed, Will had shaken hands with nearly all his old acquaintances, and been asked to "come down and see us" numberless times. Yet no letter came up from the city. Was Wayne's heart pitiless?

Indian Summer days came on in the matchless beauty of their calm, rich, ripe splendor. The country was glorious — the days and nights perfect. Father Rood de-

clared that his son should take no part in the farm-work, of which there was now little to do; but Will found time enough for work and rest and ramble too. He went nutting with Mabel through the dim, yellow, fragrant woods. He rambled over the familiar spots where he had strayed and fished before school and the city took him away. Once more he was a farm-boy, driving the cows in the morning to the mile-away pasture, and bringing them at dusk when he came up from his nightly visit to the post-office. This was the pleasantest part of the day to him — in spite of the regular disappointment at the post-office — when over the dreamy blue of the hills the lights of sunset burned, and he, following the lowing cows homeward, wondered why he had never found the country so broad and fair and lovely before.

One evening he met the Deacon and Zebu-

lon riding on a load of turnips. The deacon whoahed to his oxen and came to a standstill.

"Wall, really," said he, "how d'ye do? Zebulon said you'd got home, an' I thought I see ye to meetin' las' Sunday with your folks. Wall — how you've growed! Been pretty tol'ably healthy down there this Summer, hain't it? I mus' say you're lookin' well — right well. What kind of a place do you find the great city, anyway?"

Will was not certain which question the deacon wished answered first, but took the last one at a venture.

"I found it a very pleasant place," he said; "they were very kind to me down there."

"Really — I want to know, now! But wasn't you fearfully tempted by Satan to go astray?"

Will smiled a little.

"No more than at home, I think, Deacon Wilcox. It was different with me than with most boys — I had a home and friends to go to at once."

"Yes, I know," said the deacon, "you've been wonderfully favored by Providence. I never see the beat on't — never. An' you're act'ally drivin' the cows up! Wall, Zebulon said you wore better clothes ev'ry day than he wore to meetin', an' we kinder mistrusted you wouldn't be for s'ilin' 'em much; but I don' know but you're about the same Will Rood that you was afore. Zebulon, why don't you say somethin' to him?"

Zebulon looked sheepish and held his peace.

"That's a fine heifer, browsin' by them burdocks over there. Your father's stock is comin' up," said the deacon, approvingly. "Wall, I s'pose he ken afford to bring in the new kinds. They say you've sent home

consid'able money first and last this Summer." The deacon picked up his goad. "Wall, I hope 'twon't set ye up. Prosperity's a hard thing to bear an' you're young — very young. I won't hender ye any longer — Gee up! — Come over and see us — Go 'long! — Tell your father I ken spare him a few of them seedlin' potatoes, if he wants."

Deacon, Zebulon and turnips rolled on into the dusk, and Will hurried after the cows.

Still there was no letter. Was Wayne never going to repent?

Mother Rood watched her son's face with some anxiety. That he went to the post-office every night she did not know at first, but soon her mother's heart divined the reason of his long absence, and she had a way of meeting him at the door, when he came up the dusky path from turning the

cows into the yard, to see whether his face boded good news or disappointment. Though his face was never despairing, it had a grave look about the mouth that troubled her. Perhaps his hope was failing him, she thought.

But Will did not cast away his faith in Wayne. He must wait — patiently.

The Indian Summer was but fleeting, and two or three heavy frosts and chilly days turned the earth brown and sere. Thanksgiving was near at hand, and nearly two weeks had elapsed since his return. Still he went nightly down to the post-office — though the cows were no longer driven to pasture, and father and mother must know what he was looking and waiting for so anxiously — and came back always empty-handed. The old spectacled post-master at the corner grew somewhat anxious as well as mother Rood, and would liked to have

gratified the patient, oft-repeated, "A letter for me, Mr. Bunnel?" with "Yes, sir."

In the frosty chills which coming Winter sent before it, there was now and then a bright, calm, clear day. Such an one was the day before Thanksgiving. Will had been all the afternoon in the old pasture-lot, helping his father mend the fence. Half an hour before sunset they had driven the last stake and put up the last rail.

"Well," said father Rood, "it beats me to see how much two pairs of hands will do. You take to farmin' right well, if I do say it."

"Perhaps that is what I was born for, after all," said Will, rather gravely.

The old man took down his coat from the top of a stake and slowly put it on. Then he looked up and down the line of fence they had put up — over at the crows, in the top of the naked hickory — across the sweep

"Looking for a Letter." Page 200.

of brown, huckleberry-grown pastures, and said,

"I'm afraid that letter of yours will never come, my boy."

Will choked and turned his head away.

"Perhaps not," he said, as soon as he could speak; "if it doesn't come to-night, it seems to me that it will never come at all. If it could only come for Thanksgiving!"

Father Rood buttoned his coat tight and shouldered his axe.

"It's going to be a pretty keen night," he said, surveying Will's face with pity; "come, you've been out in this cold too long. We'll go up an' get some of mother's warm supper. She gets it pretty early the night afore Thanksgiving."

"Why, I've to go to the office yet, you know, father," said Will, looking at the sun; "I'd better start at once."

"I wouldn't go to the office to-night, my

son," said the old man, unconsciously betraying his pity in his voice; "I'd let the letter stay or come as it likes."

But Will buttoned up his coat, resolutely, and set off over the cold fields. In spite of himself, the choking sensation would come in his throat. He began to doubt whether he had really seen how much he must endure if no letter came,— if Wayne never repented. Oh, how could he, how could he be so hard of heart?

His heart swelled within him as he walked briskly over the long, lonesome pasture lots. If to-night's mail brought no letter, it seemed to him that the disappointment would be almost unbearable. Yet it was no more than he had borne every night for almost two weeks — yes, for just two weeks this very night.

He paused by the old rail fence that ran between him and the road and watched the

sober twilight stealing over the brown woods and browner fields. It was only a little way further to the corner by this cut-off across the pastures. He knew that by this time old Mr. Bunnel had trimmed his lamps, put on his spectacles and begun the nightly task of puzzling out the addresses of the letters. Was there one for him?

Whether there was one or not, he prayed that he might be strong and bear with patience. God only could help him bear this trouble. He sprang over the fence and hurried along the sombre way. The light of the little corner house and store twinkled just ahead. There was the usual crowd present at mail-time,— several farmers standing around the door with whips in their hands, the deacon's Zebulon, half-a-dozen other farm-lads, and two or three women and children waiting for the stage-coach to take them up. Will went up to

the square aperture through which the old post-master was visible, and went through with the usual "A letter for me to-night, Mr. Bunnel?" barely repressing a quiver in his voice.

"Wait — seems to me — Yes, here's a letter for sartin this time," said the old man, holding the document up to the light where he could examine it. "Been a long time a-comin'? Glad to see it here — right glad! I'll wait on ye in a minnit, Mis' Dill. Here's your letter, Rood."

Will seized the thick, double-postaged letter, gave it a quick glance — flushing with pleasure as he recognized the handwriting — then thrust it hastily into his pocket. *It had come.*

Old Mr. Bunnel gave a little shrug of satisfaction as he looked on. Then out through the crowd Will went and into the dark fields. The way home was long.

Through the silent woods, across the pastures, over the brook he bounded — thinking of nothing but the precious letter in his pocket — stopping for nothing, and pressing on that he might know all.

He burst into the kitchen as mother Rood was coming out of the buttery with a chicken-pie. The effect was much the same as on the night of his sudden appearance in their midst. But Will did not stop to look.

"It's come," he cried, "for Thanksgiving! A light — quick! You don't know how I've hurried! You don't know how I feel."

Mother Rood, comprehending the situation, made haste to light another candle.

"Is it from Wayne — or who?" she asked, nervously trying to light a match at the wrong end.

"It is directed in Nina Shirwyn's handwriting," said Will, with rather more color

in his face; "who it will prove to be from, I can't tell. Won't the candle light?"

"Bless me!" said Mother Rood, "I've been scratching the wrong end of the match all the time. There!—now it will go, I guess. Why, Will," as the light shone in his face, "I never saw you look so excited in my life."

Will sat down and tore open his letter.

CHAPTER XIV.

WAYNE'S CONFESSION.

WITHIN the envelope there were three separate letters,— one directed to Will Rood in Nina Shirwyn's handwriting, a thick little packet across which "Wayne's Confession" was written in the same clear, graceful hand, and another bearing the name of Will's father. Will took up the first note with a quick-beating heart. Nina must know, now, that he was not a thief, he thought. And this he read:

"*In the Library, 7 o'clock, evening.*

DEAR WILL,— Papa is so tired and ill to-night that I am going to be his amanuensis. He would like to write you with his own

hand, but as he really is not able, I have persuaded him to let me put upon paper what he has to say to you, hoping it will make no difference. To put you out of suspense, I will tell you at once that we know all — everything — and that your name is cleared. Wayne made a confession this morning to papa. It seems to me you cannot know how shocked we were. Mamma has not left her room since, and it was terrible to hear papa groan when he found how Wayne had fallen and how you had been wronged. And then it came when we were all so happy and hopeful! Wayne is just recovering from a brain fever, which seized him the morning of the day after you left us, and we were so happy, thinking he was going to get well (the doctor thought he could never be any better at one time) and then came the dreadful story of what he had done!

"It is very sad and lonesome here to-night. It seems to me that it can never be pleasant again. Papa groans when he thinks how you have been wronged, and says he can never, never forgive himself. If you knew how much dearer you had be——But papa says he is ready, and I will let him say what he wishes to in his own words.

'MY DEAR BOY:

I do not know how I can say all I wish to say to you in the limits of a letter. To begin with, if I have not wronged you too deeply, I want to be assured of your forgiveness for what I have done. Don't judge me too harshly, I beg of you. I thought I was doing right, for I was certain that you had deceived us It was not in my heart to suspect Wayne — Oh, Will, how can you know what I suffer to find how he has fallen? Yet, when I remember how hero-

ically you spared me the fearful truth when I was wronging you, I know that you are capable of realizing what a blow this is to us.

'My dear boy, I am ashamed and humbled when I think of your generousness. I know we never deserved it at your hands. I wonder that you could suffer such a sacrifice for us; and when I look back on that morning at the office, when I was condemning you as a criminal, and see you deliberately taking upon yourself the guilt and shame, to save us and Wayne, I have no words to express my gratefulness and appreciation of the act. I don't think any of us knew what a brave, quiet hero we had been cherishing.

'But how you will ever be repaid for all you have endured and suffered, I do not know. Perhaps you cannot forgive us — perhaps you can never look upon any of

Wayne's family with anything but aversion; still, when I remember all your goodness to us, I cannot but hope you will forgive, at least, those who were unwittingly led to suppose you guilty. As for Wayne, I can beg nothing for him at present. He shall tell his own story.

'Now, though I may be asking too much, I beg you, my dear boy, to come back to us. If it will give you too much pain I will not urge the matter; but otherwise I entreat you to come. We have missed you every hour since you went away, we are longing to see you now. I would come to you but for present troubles at home, but since this cannot be, I entreat you to return to us as soon as you receive this. I will enclose a note to your father and close, for no letter, however extended, can tell you what I wish to say. I must wait for that until I see

you face to face, which I hope will be at once.

ARTHUR SHIRWYN.'

"I am surer than papa that you will forgive us, Will, and come back. Am I not right? If you knew how we all longed for you in this sad house, I am sure you would not hesitate a minute. Wayne is to write down his story with my help, and I think I shall keep this letter until it is ready, and send the whole at once. If you could see Wayne's face you would pity him, if you could not forgive. He is certain that you will never return, and says, 'I don't ever hope to be forgiven.' But I am not so despairing. Won't you come back to us?—Won't you—for all our sakes? I shall look for you.

NINA."

At this point father Rood came in from

doing his chores at the barn. Will looked up from his papers with a bright, flushed face.

"This is the letter that was never going to come," he said, "and it holds something for you, too," tossing over Mr. Shirwyn's note.

Then he took up Wayne's confession. It was commenced in Wayne's handwriting — at present rather rambling and irregular — and was without date or heading. There were tear-stains upon it.

"Father says I am to begin at the first trouble which I fell into, and tell the whole. It is such a long story that, without Nina's help, I don't see how I can put it upon paper, and my hand trembles so that the words will be crooked and hard to read. When I left you at school in Wayland and came home to study, some one made a great

mistake. You know I wanted to stay with you, but they thought I should get on faster under a tutor. When I came home it was like stepping into a new world,— it was all so different from the quiet of school and what I had been used to. It was like getting out of prison. There was a sociable or a party almost every night, and the boys were — well, you know what they were. We used to be out a great deal evenings. It seems to me now that there was hardly a night, except on Sunday, that we were not out till ten at least, and occasionally till after midnight. Father got anxious sometimes, but neither he nor mother knew all. He was very busy those days, and supposed that Blecker looked out for me. Blecker did look out for me,— but I could always wind him round my finger.

"I knew I was getting into a wrong way, but I followed on with the others. Some-

times I thought I would write to you about it — just as I used to tell you everything at school — but I suppose I liked the way I was in too well ever to do it. Things went on so pretty much all Summer. We didn't do anything very bad — were only getting ready for what was to come, I suppose. I didn't learn to chew nor smoke. I hated that as well as the swearing and vulgar talk of the others, — you will believe that of me, at least. But there was one thing I learned to like, as well as the others, to — to —" How the writer had hesitated and bungled over the word! A great tear had fallen and stained it, — "to — to gamble a little. It was such a little, at first, that you would never have thought it could grow to what it did. We used to go a little oftener, as we got used to it, till by and by it took all my spending-money.

"I thought I would certainly break off

then, but you know well enough how hard it is for me to break a habit. So it went on, until the night in which the work was done that brought me all my misery. Tommy Brewster had plenty of money that evening and bet very high. I followed him, for I had just got a quarter's spending-money. The rest of the boys were left way behind and did not try to keep up with us. Somehow all of Tommy's money kept coming to me, and I never was so successful in my life before. By and by, Bowring, who kept the saloon, came along and began to bet against me, but it was just the same — I won all. There was a great pile of bills at my elbow, hundreds of dollars it seemed to me, for my eyes burned, my hands trembled, and I was almost wild with excitement. Bowring grew angry, losing so much, — or pretended he did — and threw a small roll of bills on the table, and said,

with an oath, 'That's the last I'll venture! I stake that against the same amount.'

'Done,' I cried, excitedly, without asking how much it was, or thinking it could possibly be more than the great thick pile of money at my elbow.

"It seemed to me I could win anything. But that time I lost. I suppose it turned just as Bowring expected. Then I told him I would stake again, but he said, 'Hand over what you've lost, first.' 'How much is it?' I said.

"It was just the amount which you saw upon the forged check. I should have fallen over if it hadn't been for Tommy. I remember as well as if it was only a moment ago how frightened the boys looked, and how sick and faint I felt. Then I told him that I could never pay it all in the world,—that when I played I thought it was not an eighth of the sum. 'But you might

have known by asking,' he swore, 'and as long as your father is good for it, it makes no particular difference.'

"I told him that I had rather be shot on the spot than to have father hear of it, and then we had a stormy time which ended as it could not help but end: I fell into his power, and yielded to his demands to keep him from telling all to father. This was three or four months before you came to live with us. From that night till this I have never entered a gambling-hell — never desired to — never thought of it except with horror and loathing. That cured me. I stayed at home nights, saw none of the boys I had been with, and tried to live for father and mother, and the rest, as I ought. But the sin had been committed. I could not do away with that. You, with your good, upright heart, can't know what I suffered with fear and shame and remorse. You

can't pity me, for you never did anything to trouble your conscience long. I see now that if I had gone to father at once and been forgiven, and helped up from where I had fallen, that all this dreadful trouble would not have come. But I was too proud for that. When we talked of sending for you I was glad and hopeful, for I thought I should tell you everything at once and you would help me. But I never got the courage, though you gave me opportunities enough.

"I suppose you can see plain enough now what has troubled me all Summer. That sin has been like some hidden reptile, gnawing and gnawing at my peace and comfort every minute. It took away all desire to enjoy myself with the rest of you. I wanted to be alone. It took all my spending-money to pay the interest upon the sum I lost, and to bribe Bowring into silence.

Sometimes he was overbearing and insulting, and then I would go home in a rage, resolved to tell you everything. You will never know how many times I have rushed up to you with the words trembling on my lips.

"By and by my tormentor wanted more for his silence, and I was forced to sell the silver vases and the marble head, and all the little trinkets and presents that had been given me. Though you was with me so much and knew me so well, you will never know how much I suffered. You can't, for I was obliged to conceal so much with fun and pleasure. God knows how I repented of the sin again and again and again, and how it eat up all my pleasure, till I had nothing left. *He* sees how I have suffered for that night's wickedness.

"Then came the climax — when we met Bowring one evening on the sidewalk, or

rather when he overtook us. He told me then that unless I paid in the whole amount before another sundown, he would lay the whole story before father without delay. I begged and entreated, but he had no more pity than a fiend. And he was the Evil One to me, for I should never have thought of the forged check but for him. I should have gone home and confessed all to father, because I should known no other way. But he said, 'You can draw any amount, the check will go in with dozens of others, and no one will ever suspect.' You know the rest."

Wayne had evidently intended to leave his confession thus; but a little way further on he had taken up the pen and written: "I do not try to excuse my last act. I knew that if the forging was detected the guilt would fall on you,— still I hoped, and even prayed, that no harm might ever come to

you. When the deed was exposed, I might have cleared your name at once, but it was only till morning that I got courage to resolve to confess my guilt, and then the fever came. I don't expect nor ask you to pity me. I know that I don't deserve it. But though I never see you nor hear from you again, I shall always thank you and love you as long as I live, for all you have done for me.

WAYNE SHIRWYN."

Nina's hand had secretly added: "Wayne is very much exhausted, writing so much. The tears fell so thick when he wrote those last lines that I've had a hard time getting them to look presentable. Will you refuse to come back to us?"

CHAPTER XV.

THANKSGIVING.

THE little kitchen was very still, the farmer and his wife sitting with grave, thankful faces — Mr. Shirwyn's note open before them — and Will, with shining eyes, folding up his letters. The clock seized the opportunity, as all clocks will, to tick very noisily.

By and by father Rood cleared his throat with a great ahem, and said,

"Well, your faith was greater than mine this time. I'd no idea you'd ever get your name cleared. Shirwyn seems to be sorry enough — can't say too much 'bout the

matter. But he don't tell who the guilty one was; speaks as if you'd told us already."

"Then," said Will, "I would rather never tell. I think he is sorry enough for it. I think he is ready to begin a better life, and I would like him to begin it with the knowledge that he has not got to struggle against the scorn or coldness of any one."

"Well," said the farmer, after a pause, "let it rest there then. If you can forgive him I'm sartin we can. It seems to me that he must be worth semethin' to undergo so much for, though."

"And shall you go back?" said mother Rood, wiping her eyes.

"Yes — I think so; they want me to come at once."

"But you won't go till after Thanksgiving?" said Mrs. Rood, taking alarm instantly; "you won't leave us to-morrow to eat our dinner all alone?"

"Oh, no," said Will, "I couldn't think of doing that! But I can go the day after, perhaps. That will be Saturday, and I'll speak to Mr. Thaddeus to-morrow to have him save me a seat."

"Well, well," said mother Rood, bethinking herself, "here we're sitting, and supper's been on the table and tea a-drawin' an hour. Don't let's wait any longer for pity's sake. Come father and Will, I want that chicken-pie cut."

Will was too happy to talk much that evening. He went up to his room early, to re-read his precious letters. The sadness and almost hopelessness of Wayne's confession touched him exceedingly. Was it right to cast Wayne off — throw him away as something worthless — because of his sin? He knew Wayne's heart as well — perhaps better than any one else. He knew what pure and good and noble things there were

in it, and what it was possible for Wayne to become. How could he think of casting him off? Happy and light-hearted he went to bed. God had remembered him. He had heard his prayer and here was the answer to it.

The next day was truly one of thanksgiving. The shadow which had hung over them had yielded place to sunshine. Never had the world or the brown countryside looked fairer to Will, than when they trundled down to church to hear Parson Hubbard's Thanksgiving sermon, coming home in the still, clear noon of the November day. Then Mabel and he rambled over some of the old walks on the farm, coming home to find the turkey and cranberry sauce waiting in the midst of a great array of wonderful dishes.

It was not very strange that father Rood's voice trembled a little when he asked the

blessing — thinking of all God had given them to be thankful for. The rest of the day passed away quickly — even too quickly for Will, who was somewhat impatient to return to the city.

The morrow was one of those dull-hued days which November brings — the sky stretching away gray and leaden over the faded fields, the leafless woods and bare, cold curves of hill and mountain. But it was all bright enough to Will as he took the stage-coach — on the outside, this time, thus causing a change in Mr. Thaddeus's convictions — and bade father and mother and Mab good-by.

How different everything looked to him now, than when he came sorrowfully home in the twilight. Mr. Thaddeus thought him a very sociable fellow, and wondered how he could have made such a mistake.

"Right glad to see ye in such good

spirits," he said, cracking his whip very loud as they rolled through the village; "thought ye acted a little dumpish the night ye came home. Got rested up here on the hills, haint ye? How do you like your business down there? Somebody said you'd helped the old folks along a good deal the last Summer. Glad on't? Seein' Burlingwood haint got but one representative in the city, it's best to send a pretty good one. Reckon we've hit on the right one, hay?"

Mr. Thaddeus might be pretty good company, but Will was not sorry to part with him at Sandplain, where he found the dwarf sitting in a warm angle of the depot with his oranges and peanuts. If this morsel of a man was not gratified by a great requisition upon his stores, it certainly was not Will's fault. He felt, in the overflow of his joy and gratitude, as if he wanted to make every unfortunate happy too.

The day grew grayer and more leaden as it advanced, and threatened snow. Twilight came on early, and lamps were glimmering through the depot when the train arrived in the city. There was no gay, light-hearted Wayne to meet him this time, but Will, full of delight and expectation, thought only of how he was going to cheer up and comfort that sad heart up in the city. Would not Wayne be surprised?

He stepped into the swift tide of the street, wondering whether, after all, this was not quite as much home to him as the quiet country. It seemed so, now. Here were the clerks and shop-girls, the merchants, the tired people who had been shut up all day, hurrying to their homes and suppers—just such a crowd as he was used to every night. The stir and bustle seemed pleasant to him.

He hoped to see Mr. Shirwyn before meeting the other members of the family, and

with a faint hope that he might still find him at the office, hurried thitherward. His brisk walking soon brought him into the familiar street. They were just lighting the gas in the salesroom, which presented the usual half-empty appearance of such rooms at dusk. How familiar it all looked! — how pleasant! He walked slowly through to the office, and entering found it dark and deserted, save a small boy who was mending the fire.

"Where is Mr. Shirwyn?" Will asked.

Before the boy could reply, the door of the inner office opened and out came — Barstow. It was too dark for him to see who had entered, but having heard a voice he turned on the gas.

"Bless my eyes!" he exclaimed,— they were certainly too sharp to need any improvement,— and wrung Will's hand as if delighted. Will did not quite understand this — from Barstow.

"So you're glad to see me — you know —" he began.

Barstow gave a quick shrug and stamped with his foot.

"Look at me," said he, "and see if you don't think I knew all from the first! My stars — yes! I saw through you — like a book. Didn't I tell you there'd be trouble? Why didn't you take my advice and get that trouble off young Shirwyn's conscience when I told you? Know all? — bah! I hope you don't think I'm a fool, Rood!"

"You knew who was really guilty?"

"To be sure — from the first! Do you suppose I didn't see what you was? I thought you'd clear yourself at once when I sent you in to Shirwyn,— rather stumped me to find you didn't. 'What's up now?' says I. Then pretty quick I saw right through it all and my stars! — 'Well, it'll do 'em both good,' says I; 'let it run its course.'

But it got to running a little too far. Thought young Shirwyn would die and never clear you up, and got anxious. It was about time for me to be saying something, I thought. If it hadn't all come out just as it did, I couldn't have held in any longer. Glad to see you — glad, glad! Country's done you good. Fine thing — the country. Wish I could get time to go myself."

"And Mr. Shirwyn — has he gone home?" said Will.

"No — rather think not. Was out in the packing-room a little while ago. Wait,— you just step into the private office and I'll go and see. I'll send him in if he hasn't gone."

Will stepped into the private office, where there was a bright light burning, and sat down at his old place. He had a vivid recollection of the last time he looked upon its four walls. What a change there had been!

And Barstow had really known all the time who was innocent and who was guilty. Well, he would not have judged the old man so lenient and friendly. There was more in people's hearts than one could fathom at once.

Pretty soon there came steps and voices without, the door opened and Mr. Shirwyn entered. Will turned from his seat with a flushed, eager face, and some one caught both his hands between their own and held him a little off, looking steadfastly at him with a face full of emotion. Not a word was said for two or three minutes. Then Will found voice to ask,

"How is Wayne?"

Mr. Shirwyn turned away his head. *This* the first question from the one who had been wronged! When he could speak, he said,

"Wayne is better — improving. And you

— you have come back to us!" There was nothing for Will to say, and for a few minutes Mr. Shirwyn seemed not to have control of his tongue. But with an effort he wheeled his big chair around beside Will's and looking at him earnestly, said, — "My dear boy, I take this as a sign that you have forgiven us and come back to brighten our sad house. If it is so, I have no words to thank you. I can only tell you that you have put us all under eternal obligations,— a debt of love and gratitude which our lifetime cannot pay. There is no use in saying more, for words lose their value sometimes, but I want you to know — " here he laid his hand upon Will's shoulder — "that you hold place in my heart — in all our hearts — with Wayne, and that your life and happiness are just as dear to us as our own and shall be forever. God sees that I speak the truth."

It was sometime before Mr. Shirwyn could

talk freely. Then Will saw what heavy lines of care had come in his face since last they saw one another, and realized better than ever before what the man's proud, sensitive nature had had to endure. There was no sternness left in it; it was sorrowful and humble.

He said, in talking of Will's departure, "I told you then that I should keep the whole matter a secret, and I have since had reason to thank God again and again that I did so. Wayne's transgression is also unknown among his friends here, — it has been a dead secret with us."

"And with me, too," said Will; "so that he can start again with no spot upon his name in other people's eyes."

Mr. Shirwyn looked unutterably grateful.

"And your folks," he said; "what did they say to his fall and your wrong?"

"They do not know he has fallen," said Will.

"Not know!—How did you clear your name to them?"

"They trusted in me," said Will, simply.

Mr. Shirwyn was silent. Of what use were words?

By and by Will asked, "Can Wayne sit up, talk, or can he walk and stir around some?"

"Oh, yes, he sits up some, but doesn't walk much. He's doing pretty well now. What *will* he say to you? He has not had the slightest hope that you would return or forgive him. He says he does not deserve it. That is one consolation,—I know he is really penitent, and has no desire to repeat his evil-doing. When I think of this I am hopeful for him. But how the time is flying!—they will be waiting supper for us. What a surprise I have got for them to-night! Yet I must go back to the packing-room a minute—I left some orders there—then we will go home without delay."

Mr. Shirwyn hurried out. Hardly had the door closed behind him when Barstow put in his head.

"Ah — you're here yet" — coming in; "well, I suppose it's straight now — your accounts and Mr. Shirwyn's. Glad of it! Knew 'twould come so."

He began putting on his overcoat, preparatory to going to supper.

"Now you tell Wayne for me" — twisting his arms into his coat sleeves — "that old Barstow — that's what he calls me — Ah! — just help me with that sleeve, if you will — I'm stiff in that shoulder! — tell him that old Barstow says, lay by the old ledger and get a new one, and see if he can't keep it free from blots and stains and bad reckoning. Then he'll know just where he stands! Tell him that from me, will you? He'll take it well, for we understand each other. Waiting for Mr. Shirwyn? Well, my supper's

waiting for me, and I'll go on. Glad to see you back in the office as soon as you're ready. Good night."

Mr. Shirwyn returned and began hastily to put on overcoat and gloves.

"I don't know what the folks at home will say or do, when they see you," he said, "for we despaired so of your return,— all but Nina; she would never believe you guilty, and has been all the while certain of your return."

"Has she?" said Will, a great flush of pleasure overspreading his face, while his eyes were just a trifle downcast.

"Yes," said Mr. Shirwyn, putting on his hat, "and she has proved a good prophet. Come, now we will go."

They went out through the store into the noisy, brilliant street.

CHAPTER XVI.

TAKING HOPE.

WILL'S thoughts, as he walked up the street beside Mr. Shirwyn, were in strong contrast to his emotions when leaving the city a little more than two weeks before. God had remembered him, his honor was unsullied, the way lay bright before him. It seemed to him that there was no comfort left to desire.

"This seems right and natural," said Mr. Shirwyn, "to have you walking home to tea with me. I missed you at night more than any other time. Ah — here comes our car, now; I thought we were too late for it."

It was mostly a silent ride. Will was thinking of the meeting which was presently to take place, and had no thoughts for anything else, until, as they came up into the quieter part of the city, familiar windows beamed out upon the street, and he caught glimpses, through the lace and muslin, of familiar faces.

He wondered whether poor Sam Tryon was still able to be moved in his arm-chair into the sunshine of the piazza. One of the most vivid of his recollections of that sad morning, when he left the city, was of seeing Sam sitting in the sunniest angle of the great villa, nodding and smiling good morning as he passed.

But now — just ahead — was home. His heart beat fast as he looked. The car stopped — they were on the pavement, through the gate, and going up the walk. The brilliant light from the parlors streamed out upon them.

Hearing the well-known footsteps on the walk, Nina came to the door to meet her father. The warm, broad light fell down upon her from the hall chandelier as, standing on tiptoe to reach her father's face, she welcomed him, unconscious of the youth who looked on with a warm throbbing in his heart. Mr. Shirwyn retained his hold of Nina, and deftly put her behind him.

"Perhaps you will find some one else to welcome," he said, turning his back upon them.

For a moment there was a silence, then Mr. Shirwyn thought he heard something that sounded like — like — well, like a kiss. He was not certain, and when he turned to look around, Nina stood motionless, with a face in which the warm, bright color was coming and going, and which shone with joy and delight.

"My dear," said the father, with a slight

smile, "I thought you would have a word or two of welcome for him."

"I do — I have!" said Nina, quickly — "only I can't say them."

The ready tears filled her eyes and she half-averted her head. But the comer thought his welcome a delightful one, and could ask for nothing more.

Mother Bunch, ever on the alert for anything unusual, here peeped through the crack of the dining-room door.

"O-o-oh-h!" said she, jumping up and down excitedly, "what do you think I see, mamma? Here's Will! Here's Will!"

She burst out like a little whirlwind and got hold both his hands.

"Oh, you dear, big boy," she said, caressingly, "ain't you good to come back? Take me up! — take me up so I can kiss you! Oh, you're the"—kiss, kiss—"gooderest boy I" — kiss, kiss — "ever see. Wa'n't Wayne

naughty to you? — and didn't you have to go way off home, you poor Will" — tears and kisses together — "till Wayne got sorry? Oh, I could kiss you 'most to death!"

"I wouldn't, Mother, because there's some one else waiting to welcome him," said Mr. Shirwyn, taking the little girl in his own arms.

Will turned and met Mrs. Shirwyn.

"My dear Will," she exclaimed, her surprise written upon her face, "how can I believe my own eyes? You have come back to us!"

"Why," said Will, with a bright face, "how did you think I could ever stay away?"

The lady whom he had once thought so grand and stately, seemed kind and tender as a mother now, as she embraced him, whispering,

"Can you ever, ever forgive Wayne?"

Will pressed her hand assuringly. Then came an awkward silence of a minute, all thinking of Wayne. Mr. Shirwyn broke it by leading the way into the cheerful supper-room, where Wayne lay upon the sofa. He lay so white and still, so changed and haggard, that Will gave a little start of alarm. What punishment he had endured!

The family turned their faces away, as Will went up to the sofa and bent over his friend,—all but Mother Bunch, whose inquisitiveness was not to be baffled. There was a long, unbroken silence. Then Mother Bunch, who had been making investigations, cried out in a sort of terrified amazement,

"Why, mamma, Wayne is crying!—so is Will! Isn't it naughty to cry when we are all so glad?—and won't you make them stop, papa?"

"Hush!" said Nina, drawing Mother Bunch away.

"And Nina's mos' ready to cry," said the elderly little lady, "for her eyes shine, and she's winkin' like everything."

Nina's hand went over Mother Bunch's mouth to prevent further revelations, but the shrewd little miss discovered that papa and mamma were troubled about the eyes in the same manner, and was silent for wonder. Mr. Shirwyn went up to the sofa at last.

"Wayne," he said, with emotion, "I think you can spare your friend long enough for him to drink tea with us. You remember he has had a long ride and is tired. There is a long evening before you."

Wayne withdrew his hand from Will's, and made a motion for him to go. They sat down at the tea-table, very quietly and tenderly happy. True, Wayne's chair was empty, but he lay on the sofa with his eyes on Will, and his face looking brighter than it had done for many a day, for hope shone in it.

Perhaps you are thinking that Wayne Shirwyn was too weak and selfish, that he had wronged too deeply to merit such forgiveness as Will Rood gave him. Who *merits* forgiveness? It is the need of all, and we receive it of God through our penitence; so he, who, through the goodness and humility of his heart, can forgive his injurer, becomes more like Him whose heart is love. One may live a life-time, unforgiving and unforgetting, to find at the end that God does not forget, and that with His love he metes out justice.

Will was too joyful to care much for supper. He did not notice or remember the contrast between the board at which he sat, and the plain one at home. The shine of the silver, the flash of the crystal, the fragrance of Mrs. Shirwyn's cups of tea, were all obscured from his senses by the remembrance of that sad, wasted face upon the

sofa. How he was going to cheer it!—What courage and hope he was going to put into Wayne's heart! He wanted to finish supper that he might commence the undertaking.

But the chairs were pushed away in good season, the tea-things cleared from the table, and instead of going to the parlors as usual, inclination settled them around and by Wayne. Will seated himself on the sofa, Nina sat at its head, and the rest a little way off. Then came a long, happy evening, full of pleasant talk, of mutual explanation, of deep and earnest rejoicing.

"It seems to me," said Wayne, speaking for the first time, "like a long, dreadful dream, in which I went to sleep when you went away, and woke up when you came back."

Wayne's face looked bright and eager, as if he had awakened from a dream of

despair to find it unreal. Nina put her face down beside his to hide her happy tears.

"Why, you dear girl," said he, caressing her brown head with his free hand, "what do you cry for? If anybody is to cry, it ought to be Will."

"Why?" said Will; "if I'm to cry, I want to know what it is for."

"Nobody's going to cry any more," said Mother Bunch, from the ottoman at her mother's feet; "father said so."

"Why," said Wayne, in answer to Will's question, "you've come back to live with us — to live with me. If any one mourns it is you who should do it. You've got reason enough for it!"

"I don't think so."

"I do," sadly; "what is the use of one person's doing so much for another as to take all the comfort out of living?"

"There," said Will, "I shall answer no such

questions. If you know of anybody around you that's so bad off they can't get any comfort out of living, I don't. I like to live, myself."

"So do I," said Mother Bunch, who was gravely looking and listening; "I don't like to die and be shut up in a trunk."

Will laughed.

"There's testimony in my favor," he said. "Now to-morrow, in the warmest part of the day, we will have the carriage out and go down and see Sam Tryon and some of the other boys. That will do you good."

But Wayne shrank and shivered at first, forgetting, for the moment, that the cause of the old fear and dread was gone forever. When he remembered, and realized how his fall was a secret known only to God and these faithful friends, he lay quiet with gratitude. God and the rest were too good to him, he thought.

"Yes," said Will, "it will do us both good to see Sam, and I've got a great parcel of oranges to give him. I don't suppose they're one quarter as nice as those he haves every day, but I'm going to tell him of the cripple — the morsel of a man — that I bought them of. Sam has a fellow-feeling for deformed people."

"You're the same Will Rood as ever," said Wayne, looking at him as if somewhat surprised that it could be so, "and you don't know what a comfort it is to me. It is as if I had got hold of something strong that was going to pull me up."

"Will was always a magician," said Nina. "I know just what his effect will be on Wayne, as if all had taken place, now."

She looked her thanks and gratefulness over Wayne's head at Will.

Mrs. Shirwyn looked at her watch and reminded her husband that it was after nine.

"Ah — indeed," said he, "how can it be so late? I'm sorry to end our evening, but the doctor desires Wayne to retire early at present. You've rather over-sat your hour to-night, my son. I had better call Blecker at once."

"I'll take Blecker's place," said Will, quietly; "I would rather — so would Wayne, I guess. My shoulder is stout enough for us both."

"And your heart, too," thought Mrs. Shirwyn.

Mother Bunch came up to kiss them good night, the others drew near. Mrs. Shirwyn kissed him as fervently as if she had been his own mother, and Mr. Shirwyn said,

"To-morrow we will begin a brighter and happier life, and pray God to keep us from bringing anything wicked or impure into it. Good night, my boys."

And Nina? Nina held out her hand to

him and said good night with more in her face and eyes than could have been put into words.

"Well, said Wayne, humbly, as they slowly ascended the stairs, "I don't know but I shall always have to lean upon you. I don't feel as if I was ever going to be strong enough to go alone — in some things."

"That is better than to be too sure of your strength," said Will, brightly; "we'll see about your going alone by and by!"

Blecker's hand had made the room bright and cheery. A flameless bed of coal shone in the grate, the gas was burning and the curtains drawn. Will's quick eyes took in the fact that the silver vases had come back to their place upon the shelf, and that the lovely marble head, tinted by the fire-glow, was looking down over its shoulder. Wayne sat down on foot the of the bed to rest, while Will, with a delightful consciousness of the

cosiness and charm of everything, busied himself about him. But Wayne, lost, for the time, to the present, and with little pleasure to look back upon, turned his eyes toward the future. What was there in it for him?

"Ah," said he, to Will, "do you think that sometime — in the future, perhaps — I may become strong of heart, as I ought to be?"

"Yes," said his friend, "with God's help and all our help."

"Yes," said Wayne, fervently, "I shall have you to be always nearer than a brother! Sometime, you know," he added, with something like a smile, "you may really be my brother" — thinking of Nina — "though that can't make you any dearer than you are now."

This prophecy, though it has nothing to do with my story, may very likely come true.

"Well," said Wayne, rising up till he stood straight and erect, "when I think of all the past, and the future that may be, I am almost light-hearted to think what a brave, pure, noble life, with God's help, I may make my own; and now that I have learned to ask His help, I will try to make it such. I mean it, Will, and the feeling that I *will* do this is down deep in my heart."

Will thought he had never looked nobler or manlier than while saying these words; and the years, which try all our good resolves, proved Wayne's to be deep-rooted and not able to be overthrown. The much-desired strong and pure heart was his.

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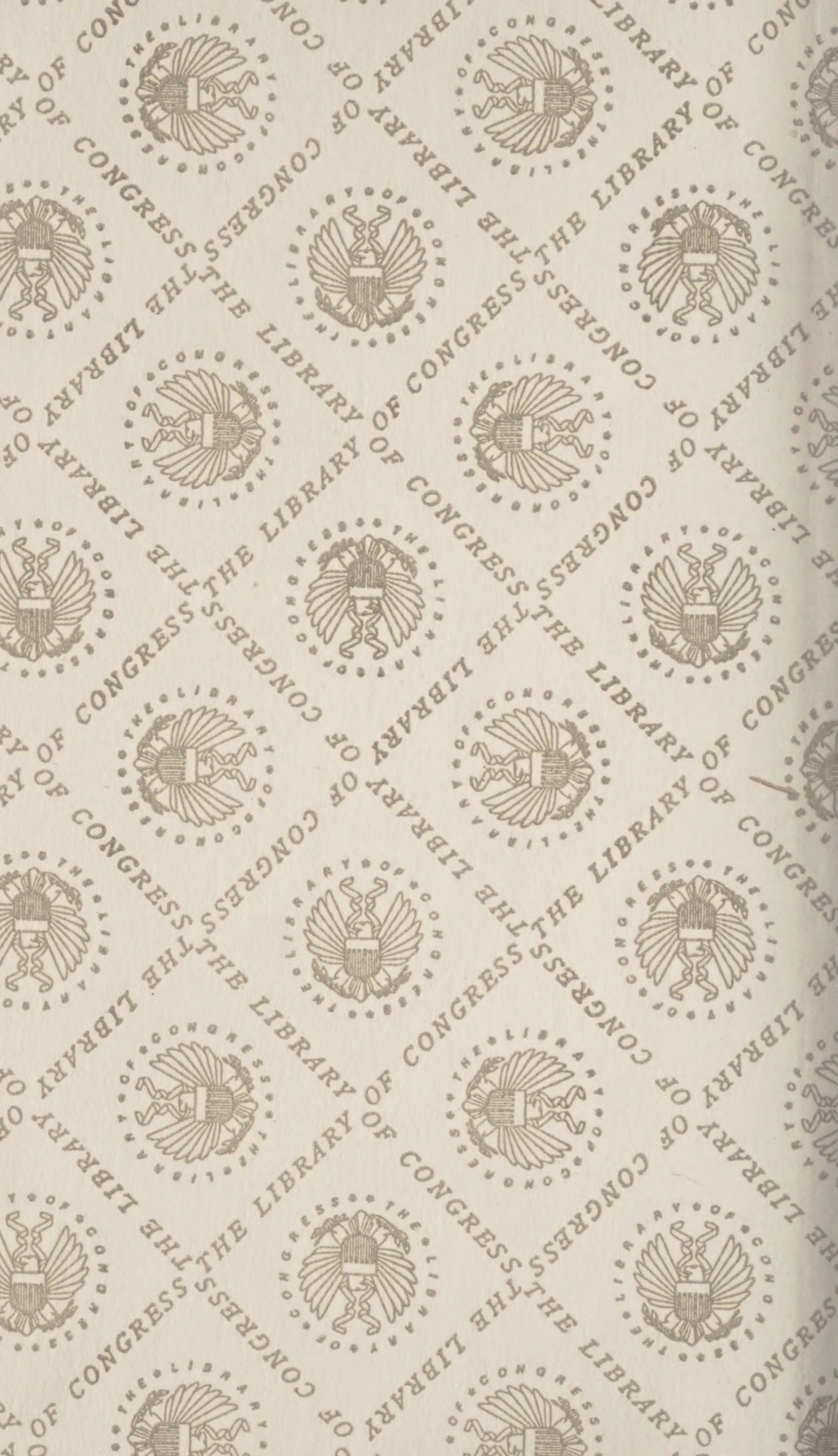
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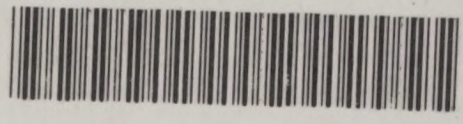

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